

ADVENT MEDITATION CONCERT

December 4, 2020

MALTA

Mro. Christian A. Almada,
organ and texts

First Reflection

Advent is the time of waiting ...

Waiting is something structural to man. Every one of us has to recognize in his own experience to what extent of waiting he can withstand in his life, and how he presents it. We can say that waiting is the very structure of our nature and our soul. Structurally, man awaits; structurally he is a vagabond: because structurally life is a promise that needs to be fulfilled.

Each year Advent is presented as a parable of our own existence: we await that the same happens in our own life. As Christians, we know that this fulfilment has already "descended upon us in a wise and intelligent way". As Christians, we await the complete fulfilment of this gift.-. we declare this every time we participate at Mass: "We announce your death, Lord, we proclaim your resurrection, awaiting your glorious coming." We await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore we start our Advent meditation by saying: "Come, Redeemer of the Nations"; "Come now, Jesus, from the heavens above!" with 3 chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach.

For the first two chorales that we will listen to (two different versions from the same chorales: "*Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*" - Come Redeemer of Nations) - Bach was inspired by the German translation that Martin Luther had made of the Gregorian melody of the hymn "*Veni redemptor Gentium*" (composed by St Ambrose).

The third: "*Kommst du nun, Jesu...*" (Come now, Jesus, from the heavens above) is a transcription and adaptation for the organ from the Aria for the *kontralto* and violin from the same Cantata n.137: joy and freshness characterise this prayer:

Bach BWV 599; 659; 650

Second Reflection

One of the characteristic features of Advent in view of the coming of the Lord is that we are vigilant. This is where we are called to be like the prudent virgins in the parable; called to have our oil lamps ready, have despondency in our hearts, to freely accept the Lord.

Next, we will listen to two versions of the chorale "*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*" (Awake! The Voice is calling us!).

The first is Bach's choral organ which is an extract from his Advent cantatas (n° 140).

The text of the cantata, inspired by the parable of the ten virgins, is an excellent biblical commentary on which Bach describes in his music; in fact, the rhythmic and cheerful play of the right hand supported by a bass is heard by the trumpet that brings the melody of the choral:

Wake up! called the voices of the guards
calling us from the top of the tower,
wake up! O city of Jerusalem!
Midnight has struck.
they are calling us in a clear voice:
Where are you, wise virgins?
Hurry, as the bridegroom has arrived.
Wake up! take the oil lamps,
Alleluia!
Get ready for the bridegroom,
you who are going to meet him!

The second version is a Romantic French composition from the same chorales with which Charles-Marie Widor, which recalls and remembers the one who considered the inexhaustible source of organ music: J. S. Bach.

Bach BWV 645
Widor "*Marche du Veilleur de Nuit*"

Third Reflection

There is a Gregorian chant of particular beauty in which a verse echoes the words of the great prophet Isaiah, which reads "*Rorate caeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum*" (The skies dripped from above and the clouds drizzled justice) (Is:45:8).

The most beautiful song of this liturgical period is the Rorate – the Advent period. There is nothing more beautiful than this chant which expresses the meaning of waiting for Christmas and prepares to renew its power to change our personal life and that of the world.

Rorate coeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum.

The refrain is the cry of the poor, the cry of the beggar. It is a cry already full of certainty that the Lord is coming, to forgive and redeem us. In our arid desert similar to our lives, true life flourishes in the desert of our humanity, humanity that is wounded and exhausted by its mortal weakness. In fact, from this we see that Christ is saved and is therefore a real presence in the life of man: from the fact that life is reborn, that humanity flourishes again, that my mind and affection are wide open and empowered.

In the text and melody of that chant there is, in synthesis, the full meaning of the liturgical season of Advent: sadness, despair, desolation for the sinned man and hope of salvation promised from God and a near reality that gives consolation.

In the middle part of this concert-meditation we now listen to 3 different organ versions inspired by this chant "*Rorate caeli*": the first and the third are in French (D. Paul Benoit and J. Demessieux), whilst the second - from the Italo-American Pietro Yon, - opens the Advent Suite in which each movement recalls some well-known chant of this waiting period: together with the Rorate Caeli there is the melody of the "*Veni Emanuel, Veni Domini*", and the "*Ave Maria*" from "*Creator alme siderum*".

Dom P. Benoit - P. Yon - Demessieux

Fourth Reflection

Our active vigilance is full of desire. It is an expectation that truly reflects the Latin etymology: "*ad-tendere*", which indicates a "tension towards", "an attention directed to", which gives us a centrifugal movement of the spirit in another direction, a future direction. "The Christian", wrote Cardinal Newman, "is the one who awaits Christ".

So, Advent would be a time in which we suspend our lives waiting for a future not yet realized??? Would it be a time of standing by waiting for an utopia which we do not know whether or not it will realise?

The coming of the Lord at the end of time is not an utopian future that may perhaps come true, but is instead (using the words of Saint Augustine) a **present of the future** that we await in HOPE. And this is possible because we have a promise that is fulfilled every day: the **present of our present**: God is with us.

I am with you always until the end of time (Mt 28,20)

Therefore, we await the One who is already a God with us, who is EMMANUEL. Advent, in fact, is not only a time of waiting for Parousia - the hour in which we see Jesus glorified at the end of time, but it is also a propitious time to learn and to see Emmanuel, the God that is present with us throughout our lives and who visits us continuously.

We conclude this musical meditative journey with a text that describes this presence of the awakening of our Lord: "*Ach bleib mit deiner Gnade*" ("Stay with us with your grace". Lk 24), by the German Sigrid Karg-Elert. The concert started in Bach's Baroque Germany and will conclude in Tardo-romantic Germany of Karg-Elert, who had passed through the 19th century France and Italy v from Widor, Benoit, Yon, Demessieux.

From this concert-mediation of Advent, we wish to conclude with the sign of Easter: because it is the Lord's Easter that gives meaning to the whole liturgical year, Advent included. In fact, we started this Advent meditation with the sign of Easter "Come Redeemer of the People!". The Incarnation is not an end in itself but a Redemption that happened, made during the Resurrection of Jesus, and this is the same message we want to conclude tonight's meeting with a heart-felt shout "Come Lord!" and together with the disciples from Emmaus we say: "Stay with us, Amen!"

Sigfrid Karg-Elert