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Video Message of the Holy Father to the participants in the Fourth International Conference on music promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father to the participants in the Fourth International Conference on Music, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture in collaboration with the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music and the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm, to take place online this year on 4 and 5 February, on the theme: "Church and Music: Texts and Contexts":

Video Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to address a greeting to you, who are participating in the Fourth International Conference on Music, organised by the Pontifical Council for Culture in collaboration with the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music and the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm. I thank Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, promoter of this initiative.

I hope that your reflections, which have as their theme "Texts and Contexts", may enrich the ecclesial communities and those who work in the field of music, an area that is very important for liturgy and evangelisation.

In the book of the prophet Isaiah we find this exhortation:

"Sing to the Lord a new song,

His praise from the end of the earth" (42: 10).

As is known, the Bible has inspired numerous musical expressions, including some fundamental pages in the

history of music: think of Gregorian chant, Palestrina, Bach... it has inspired a great variety of compositions on all five continents, and also various contemporary composers have been influenced by sacred texts. Many ecclesial communities, in recent decades, have been able to interpret these texts both by following new musical forms and by rediscovering the value of ancient heritage. Indeed, the Church's musical heritage is very varied, and can support not only liturgy but also concert performances, school and catechetical activities, and even theatre.

We know, however, that since the beginning of the Covid pandemic, activity in the field of music has been severely curtailed. My thoughts are with all those who have been affected: the musicians, who have seen their lives and professions disrupted by the demands of distancing; those who have lost their jobs and social contact; those who have had to cope with the necessary training, education and community life in difficult contexts. Many have made significant efforts to continue to provide a music service with new creativity. This is a valid commitment not only for the Church, but also in the public sphere, for the "network" itself, for those working in concert halls and other places where music is at the service of the community.

I hope that this aspect of social life may also be reborn: that we will return to singing and playing and enjoying music and singing together. Miguel Cervantes said in *Don Quixote*: "Donde hay música, no puede haber cosa mala" (Part II, c. 34): "Where there is music, there can be nothing bad". Many texts and compositions, through the power of music, stimulate everyone's personal conscience and also create a universal brotherhood.

The prophet Isaiah, in that same passage, continued:

"For a long time I have held my peace,

I have kept still and restrained myself" (42: 14).

A good musician knows the value of silence, the value of the pause. The alternation between sound and silence is fruitful and permits listening, which has a fundamental role in every dialogue. For musicians, the common challenge is to listen to each other. In the liturgy we are invited to listen to the Word of God. The Word is our "text", the main text; the community is our "context". The Word is the source of sense, it enlightens and guides the journey of the community. We know how necessary it is to tell the story of salvation in languages and idioms that can be understood. Music too can help the biblical texts to "speak" in new and different cultural contexts, so that the divine word can effectively reach minds and hearts.

In your meeting you have chosen to give attention to the most diverse musical forms: they express the variety of cultures and local communities, each with its own ethos. I am thinking particularly of indigenous civilisations, where the approach to music is integrated with the other ritual elements of dance and celebration. In this context, engaging narratives can emerge at the service of evangelisation. Indeed, the integral experience of musical art also includes the dimension of corporeality. A parallelism is often found in popular tradition: "To be well is to sing well, and to sing well is to be well!"

And I would like to conclude with a question, which comes naturally in the situation we find ourselves in, caused by the pandemic: is the silence we are experiencing empty or are we listening? Is it empty or are we listening? Will we then allow a new song to emerge? May the text and context, now present in a new form, stimulate us to resume our journey together, because "the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices" (Instruction *Musicae sacram*, 5). May voices, musical instruments and compositions continue to express, in the present context, the harmony of God's voice, leading towards the "symphony", that is, universal brotherhood.

I entrust your commitment to God so that He may sustain it and make it fruitful. And I ask you all to pray for me. Enjoy your work. Thank you!

