



The Holy See

CONCERT OFFERED BY PRESIDENT GIORGIO NAPOLITANO
OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC IN HONOUR
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF PONTIFICATE
ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Thursday, 30 April 2009*

*Mr President of the Republic,
Your Eminences,
Honourable Ministers,
Venerable Brothers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In extending my cordial greeting to all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the President of the Italian Republic, Hon. Giorgio Napolitano, who, on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the beginning of my Pontificate, has offered me this excellent musical homage. Thank you, Mr President, also for the courtesy of the words you addressed to me a moment ago, and a warm greeting also to your gracious wife. I am pleased to greet the Ministers and other Authorities of the Italian State, as well as the Ambassadors and other figures that honour us with their presence.

I greatly enjoyed the return of the Orchestra and "Giuseppe Verdi" Chorus from Milan which we also much appreciated one year ago. Therefore, while I thank the homonymous Foundation and all those who in various ways collaborated in the organization, I renew my congratulations to all members of the Orchestra and Choir, especially to the conductor, Miss Zhang Xian, to the Choir director, Miss Erina Gambarini, and to the three soloists. The skill and enthusiasm of each one contributed to a performance which truly gave new life to the musical excerpts, works of three outstanding Authors: Vivaldi, Haydn and Mozart. I found the choice of compositions quite

appropriate for the liturgical season which we are living: the season of Easter. Haydn's 95th Symphony which we heard first seems to contain within itself an itinerary which we could call "paschal".

It begins, in fact, in the key of C minor, and, following a route which is always perfectly balanced yet also dramatic, reaches its conclusion in C major. This makes one think of the journey of the soul towards peace and serenity, represented in particular by the cello. Immediately after, Mozart's 35th Symphony reaches a point which amplifies and crowns the victory of life over death, of joy over sadness. Indeed, in it, a sense of celebration decisively prevails. The movement is very dynamic, even overwhelming, in its finale and here the orchestral virtuosos have made us understand how strength can be harmonized with grace. This is what happens at the highest level in God's love, if I may allow myself this approach, in which power and grace coincide.

Next, the human voices the choir entered onto the scene, as if to give word to what the music had already sought to express. And it is not by chance that the first word was "*Magnificat*". Coming from Mary's heart predestined by God for her humility this word became the daily song of the Church, precisely in this hour of vespers, the hour which invites us to meditate upon the meaning of life and history. Clearly, the *Magnificat* presupposes the Resurrection, that is, the victory of Christ: in him, God fulfilled his promises, and his mercy revealed itself in all of its paradoxical strength. Up until now we have spoken about the "word". And Vivaldi's music? It is worth noting, first of all, the fact that the soloists' arias he composed expressly for certain student singers of his in the *Pietà* Hospital of Venice: five orphans gifted with extraordinary singing skills. How can one not think of the humility of the young Mary, through whom God accomplished "great things"? Thus, it is as if these five "soloists" represent the voice of the Virgin, while the choral sections represent the Church community. Both Mary and the Church are united in the unique song of praise to the "Holy One", to God who, with the power of his love, realizes his just designs in history. And to conclude, the chorus gave voice to that sublime masterpiece which is Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*. Here meditation gives way to contemplation: the gaze of the soul upon the Blessed Sacrament, recognizing the *Corpus Domini*, that Body which was truly sacrificed on the cross and from which the source of universal salvation flowed. Mozart composed this motet shortly before his death, and in it one may say that music truly becomes prayer, abandon of the heart to God, with a profound sense of peace.

Mr President, your gracious and generous homage broadly enabled not only the gratification of an aesthetic sense but also the simultaneous nourishment of our spirit, and for this I am doubly grateful. I express my best wishes for the execution of your important mission, willingly extending them to all the Authorities present. Dear friends, thank you for coming! Remember me in your prayers, so that I may always accomplish my ministry as the Lord wishes. May he, who is our peace and our life, bless each of you and your families. Good evening to all!

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