



The Holy See

CONCERT IN HONOR OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF SAINT JOSEPH, HIS PATRON SAINT

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Clementine Hall
Friday, 19 March 2010

Dear Friends,

At the end of such intense and spiritually profound listening, the best thing would be to preserve the silence and to prolong our meditation. Nevertheless I am very glad to address a greeting to you and to thank each one of you for your presence on the Feast of my name day, especially those who have offered me this deeply appreciated gift.

I express my cordial gratitude to Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State, for his beautiful words to me. I greet with affection the other Cardinals, the Cardinal Dean Sodano and the Prelates present. My special thanks then go to the musicians, starting with Maestro José Peris Lacasa, a composer closely linked to the Spanish Royal Family. He is to be credited with having composed a version of *The Seven Last Words of Our Redeemer on the Cross* by Franz Joseph Haydn which takes up the version for a string quartet and that in the form of an oratorio which Haydn wrote. I also congratulate the Henschel Quartet for its praiseworthy performance and Mrs Susanne Kelling, who put her extraordinary voice at the service of the Lord Jesus' holy words.

The choice of this work was truly felicitous. In fact, if on the one hand its austere beauty is worthy of the Solemnity of St Joseph after whom the eminent composer was also named on the other, its content is particularly suited to the Lenten Season. Indeed, it prepares us to live the central Mystery of the Christian faith. *The last seven words of our Redeemer on the Cross* is truly one of the most sublime examples in the field of music of how it is possible to unite art and faith.

The musician's composition is wholly inspired and almost "directed" by the Gospel texts that culminate in the words Jesus uttered before drawing his last breath. However, in addition to being bound by the text, the composer was also bound by the precise conditions imposed by those who commissioned the work, dictated by the particular type of celebration in which the music was to be performed.

And it was precisely on the basis of these very strict obligations that he could manifest the full excellence of his creative genius. Having to conceive of seven dramatic and meditative sonatas, Haydn focused on their intensity, as he himself said in a letter of the time: "Every sonata, or every text, is expressed by means of instrumental music alone so that it will necessarily inspire the most profound impression in the listener's soul, even in someone who is least attentive" (*Letter to W. Forster*, 8 April 1787).

In this there is something similar to the work of the sculptor who must constantly be able to master the material with which he is working—let us think of the marble of Michelangelo's "Pieta"—and yet succeed in making this matter eloquent, in eliciting from it a unique and unrepeatable synthesis of thought and emotion, an absolutely original artistic expression but which, at the same time, is totally at the service of that precise content of faith as if it were dominated by the event it is portraying—in our case the seven words and their context.

Here is concealed a universal law of artistic expression: the ability to communicate beauty, which is also goodness and truth, by a tangible means a painting, a piece of music, a sculpture, a written text, a dance, etc. Indeed, it is the same law that God followed to communicate himself and his love to us: he became incarnate in our human flesh and realized the greatest masterpiece of all Creation: "the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus", as St Paul wrote (1 Tim 2:5). The "harder" the material, the more demanding are the bonds of expression and the more visibly the artist's genius stands out. Thus on the "hard" Cross, God spoke in Christ the most beautiful, the truest Word of love, which is Jesus in his full and definitive gift of himself. He is God's last word, not in a chronological but in a qualitative sense. He is the universal, absolute Word, but it was spoken through that real man, in that time and in that place, in that "hour", John's Gospel says.

This binding of oneself to history, to the flesh, is a sign par excellence of faithfulness, of a love so free that it does not fear to be bound for ever, to express the infinite in the finite, the whole in the fragment. This law, which is the law of love, is also the law of art in its highest expressions. Dear friends, perhaps I have carried on this reflection a bit too long, but the blame or perhaps the merit belongs to Franz Joseph Haydn. Let us thank the Lord for these great artistic geniuses who felt able to illustrate his Word Jesus Christ and his words the Sacred Scriptures. I renew my thanks to all who conceived of and prepared this tribute: may the Lord lavishly reward each one.

In German: I cordially thank once again all those who made this evening possible. I address

special thanks to the Henschel Quartet and to Mrs Susanne Kelling, the mezzosoprano who with her expressive musical performance brought us close to the words of the Saviour on the Cross. Many thanks!

In Spanish: I very cordially thank Maestro José Peris Lacasa, the author of a successful reworking of the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross by Haydn which we have had the pleasure of hearing today. I also greet those who have come from Spain for this occasion. Thank you very much.

In Italian: I renew to all a cordial greeting in the hope that you may follow Jesus closely, like the Virgin Mary, to live Holy Week in depth and to celebrate in truth Easter, which is now at hand. With this intention, I impart my Blessing to you and to your loved ones.

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