



The Holy See

CONCERT OFFERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY
IN HONOR OF THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE HOLY FATHER'S PONTIFICATE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Paul VI Hall
Friday, 11 May 2012*

*Hon. President of the Republic,
Dear Cardinals,
Hon. Ministers and Authorities,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Presbyterate,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

A heartfelt and respectful greeting to the President of the Italian Republic, Hon. Giorgio Napolitano and to his dear wife, to which I add my sincere gratitude for his cordial words, for the gifts of a violin and of a valuable score, and for this concert of sacred music by two great Italian composers. They are signs that show once again the bond between the Successor of Peter and this dear nation. I greet the Prime Minister, Senator Mario Monti, and all the Authorities. A sincere “thank you” to the Orchestra and Choir of the *Teatro dell’Opera* of Rome, to the two sopranos and especially to Maestro Riccardo Muti for his deep interpretation and performance. Maestro Muti’s sensibility for sacred music is well known, as is his commitment to spreading knowledge of this rich repertoire which expresses in music the faith of the Church. For this reason too, I am happy to confer a papal honour on him. I express my gratitude to the municipality of Cremona, to the Walter Stauffer Musicology Centre and to the Antonio Stradivari-La Triennale Foundation for having placed various antique and precious instruments of their collections at the disposal of prominent members of the Orchestra.

Antonio Vivaldi is a great exponent of the Venetian musical tradition. Who does not know at least

his “Four Seasons”! However, his sacred production is still not well known; it occupies a significant place in his work and is of great value, especially because it expresses his faith. The *Magnificat*, which we heard, is Mary’s song of praise and that of all the humble of heart, who recognize and acknowledge with joy and gratitude the action of God in their own life and in history; of God whose “style” is different from man’s, because he sides with the least to give hope. And Vivaldi’s music expresses praise, exultation, gratitude, and also wonder before God’s work, with an extraordinary wealth of sentiments: from the solemn chorale at the beginning, in which the whole Church magnifies the Lord, to the vivacious “*Et exultavit*”, to the most beautiful choral moment of the “*Et misericordia*” on which he pauses with bold harmonies, rich with improvised modulations, to invite us to meditate on the mercy of God who is faithful and reaches all generations.

With the two sacred pieces by Giuseppe Verdi that we heard, the register changes: we are before Mary’s sorrow at the foot of the Cross: *Stabat Mater dolorosa*. The great Italian opera composer, who looked into and expressed the drama of so many personages in his works, here sketches that of the Virgin who looks at her Son on the Cross. The music becomes essential, it almost “grips” the words to express the content in the most intense way possible, a great gamut of sentiments. Suffice it to think of the aching sense of mercy with which the Sequence begins, to the dramatic “*Pro peccatis suae gentes*”, to the whispered “*dum emisit spiritum*” to the choral invocations charged with emotion, but also with serenity, addressed to Mary “*fons amoris*”, so that we can participate in her maternal grief and let our hearts burn with love for Christ, up to the last stanza, intense and powerful prayer to God that the glory of Paradise may be given to the soul, ultimate aspiration of humanity.

The *Te Deum* is also a succession of contrasts, because Verdi pays meticulous attention to the sacred text, in order to render it in a different way from tradition. He does not see so much the song of victory or crowning but, as he writes, the succession of situations: the initial exultation — “*Te Deum*”, “*Sanctus*” — the contemplation of Christ Incarnate, who liberates and opens the Kingdom of Heaven, the invocation to the “*Judex venturus*”, to have mercy, and finally the repeated cry of the soprano of and the chorus “*In te, Domine speravi*” with which the passage closes, almost as if it were Verdi’s own request for hope and light in the last stage of life (cf. *Letters of Giuseppe Verdi*). Those we heard this evening are the last two pieces written by the composer, not destined for publication, but written only for himself; in fact, he would have liked to have been buried with the score of the *Te Deum*.

Dear friends, I hope that this evening we can repeat to God with faith: In you, Lord, I joyfully place my hope, make me love you as your Holy Mother, so that at the end of the journey my soul may be given the glory of Paradise. Again thank you to Mr President of the Republic, to the soloists, to the whole orchestra and choir of the *Teatro dell’Opera* of Rome, to Maestro Muti, to the organizers and to all here present. May the Lord bless you and your loved ones. My heartfelt thanks.

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