



The Holy See

CONCERT IN HONOUR OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
OFFERED BY CONDUCTOR ENOCH ZU GUTTENBERG

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 16 October 2010*

(Video)

*Your Eminencies,
Venerable Brothers,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At the end of such intense listening, the mind would like to pause in recollection but at the same time feels the need to express gratitude.

I would like to offer my cordial thanks to Maestro Enoch zu Guttenberg for the kind words he has addressed to me and for having wished to offer me this concert, together with the splendid Die KlangVerwaltung Orchestra, with the combined Neubeuern Choir and with the Family of the Freiherren von und zu Guttenberg. I express my grateful appreciation to the Maestro, who has conducted the performance, to the soloists and to each member of the Orchestra and of the Choir. I warmly thank you!

I am glad to greet the Cardinals, the Prelates, especially the Synod Fathers, the distinguished Authorities and all of you – including the poor assisted by the Diocesan *Caritas* of Rome – who have been able to enjoy this excellent performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem Mass*. He composed it in 1873, in memory of Alessandro Manzoni whom he admired and almost venerated. In a letter he wondered: "What can I tell you of Manzoni? How can I explain to you the sweetest, indefinable and new sensation that I felt in the presence of this Saint, as you call him?".

In the great composer's mind, the *Requiem Mass* must have been the crowning and final work of his musical opus; it was not only a tribute to the great writer but also the response to a creative, inner and spiritual requirement that confrontation with Manzoni's human and Christian stature inspired in him.

Giuseppe Verdi spent his life scrutinizing the human heart; in his works he shed light on the drama of the human condition with the music, the stories told and the various figures. His theatre is peopled by the unhappy, the persecuted and victims. This tragic vision of human destiny echoes throughout so many passages of the *Requiem Mass*. Here we touch on the inevitable reality of death and the fundamental question of the transcendent world; and Verdi, free from theatrical elements, represents, with the words of the Catholic Liturgy and with music alone, the range of human sentiments in the face of life's conclusion: the human being's anguish in confronting his own frail nature, his sense of rebellion as he faces death, his consternation on the threshold of eternity. This music invites reflection on the last realities with all the moods of the human heart in a series of contrasting forms, registers and colours, in which dramatic and melodious moments alternate, marked by hope.

Giuseppe Verdi, who, in a famous letter to the publisher, Ricordi, described himself as “something of an atheist”, wrote this *Mass*, which appears to us as a great call to the Eternal Father in the attempt to overcome the cry of despair in the face of death, to rediscover the longing for life that becomes a silent, heartfelt prayer: “*Libera me, Domine*” [Free me, Lord]. Verdi's *Requiem*, in fact, begins with a passage in G minor which almost seems to sink towards silence – only a few muted bars of the cello, played very softly – and ends with the hushed invocation to the Lord, “*Libera me*”. This cathedral of music describes the spiritual drama of man in the presence of Almighty God, of man who cannot escape the eternal question on his own existence.

After writing the *Requiem Mass*, Verdi was to live a sort of second “season of composition”, which would end once again with religious music, the *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*: a sign of his spiritual restlessness, a sign that the longing for God is engraved in the heart of the human being because our hope rests in the Lord. “*Qui Mariam absolvisti, et latronem exaudisti, mihi quoque spem dedisti*”, we heard: “You who forgave Mary (Magdalen) and answered the good thief, have also given hope to me”. The great musical fresco of this evening renews in us the certainty of St Augustine's words: “*Inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te* – Our hearts are restless until they rest in you” (*Confessions*, I, 1).

Dear friends, we must thank the Lord once again for granting us a moment of true beauty that can raise our spirit. At the same time we must also thank those who have made themselves instruments of divine Providence! My warm thanks are therefore once again addressed to Professor zu Guttenberg, to the soloists and to the members of the Orchestra and of the Choir, and to all those who contributed in different ways to organizing this beautiful evening. May God reward you all. Thank you and have a good evening!

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