



The Holy See

CONCERT IN HONOUR OF THE HOLY FATHER
PLAYED BY THE BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK, THE ORCHESTRA
AND CHOIR OF BAVARIAN RADIO

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 27 October 2007

*Your Eminence,
Honourable Mr President,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Professor Gruber,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

After this moving musical event I would like to express my deep gratitude to everyone who contributed to its realization. In the first place, of course, I thank the Symphonic Orchestra and Choir of Bavarian Radio together with the excellent soloists and their expert Conductor Mariss Jansons. The sensitive and involving interpretation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony - a further proof of their exceptional talent - will re-echo within me for a long time and will live on in my memory as a special present. However, I would also like to thank them for the excellent performance of "*Tu es Petrus*" that was composed here in Rome for St Peter's Basilica and is one of the great works of choral literature. Lastly, I thank Cardinal Friedrich Wetter and Prof. Thomas Gruber for the kind and profound words with which they have, so to speak, "delivered" the gift of this concert.

The Ninth Symphony, this impressive masterpiece which - as you said, dear Cardinal - belongs to the universal patrimony of humanity, stirs me ever anew to wonder. After years of inner isolation and a withdrawn life in which Beethoven had to combat the internal and external difficulties that caused him depression and profound bitterness and threatened to stifle his artistic creativity, the composer, by then totally deaf, amazed the public in 1824 with a composition that broke with the traditional form of the symphony and with the cooperation of orchestra, choir and soloists, rose to

an extraordinary finale of optimism and joy. What had happened?

The music itself allows attentive listeners to guess something of what was at the root of this unexpected explosion of joy. The overwhelming sentiment of jubilation transformed into music here is far from trivial or superficial: it is a sentiment won with effort, overcoming the inner emptiness of someone whom deafness had forced into isolation - the empty fifths at the beginning of the first movement and the constant bursting in of a gloomy atmosphere are an expression of it.

Silent loneliness, however, had taught Beethoven a new way of listening which went far beyond the mere ability to hear in his imagination the sound of the notes that he read or wrote. In this context, a mysterious saying of the Prophet Isaiah springs to my mind in which, speaking of a victory of truth and righteousness, he said: "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see" (cf. 29: 18-24). Mention is thus made of a perceptiveness that those who obtain the grace of external and internal liberation receive from God as a gift.

When in 1989, the Choir and Orchestra of the Bavarian Radio were performing the symphony we have just heard, conducted by Leonard Bernstein on the occasion of the "fall of the [Berlin] wall", they changed the text of the "Ode to Joy" to "*Freedom, beautiful spark of God*", thereby expressing more than the simple sentiment of the historic moment: true joy is rooted in that freedom which, basically, God alone can give. He wants to make us - sometimes through periods of emptiness and inner isolation - attentive and capable of "hearing" his silent presence not only "above the star-strewn vault", but in the innermost depths of our soul. It is here that the spark of divine love glows that can set us free for what we truly are.

With a heartfelt "Vergelt's Gott", a warm "thank you", I cordially impart my Blessing to you all.

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