



The Holy See

CONCERT PERFORMED BY REGENSBURGER DOMSPATZEN
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 85th BIRTHDAY
OF MSGR. GEORG RATZINGER

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Sistine Chapel
Saturday, 17 January 2009

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in
the Priesthood,
Esteemed Bishop Gerhard Ludwig,
Most Honoured Guests
from Regensburg,
Appreciated Musicians and
Dear Cathedral Choir,
Dear Georg,
Dear Italian-speaking Friends,*

Having just heard Mozart's Mass in C minor, I remember the time, long ago in 1941, when on the initiative of my beloved brother Georg we went to the Salzburg Festival together. We were able to go to some wonderful concerts and among them, one in the Basilica of St Peter's Abbey at which the C minor Mass was performed. It was an unforgettable moment, I would say the spiritual peak of that cultural trip. For this very reason it has been a cause of special joy to us on the happy occasion of my brother's birthday to be able once again to hear this magnificent and profound sacred composition by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the great son of the city of Salzburg. On behalf of my brother too, I thank you for this wonderful gift that has enabled us to relive moments of extraordinary spiritual and artistic intensity.

Dear Georg, dear friends, almost 70 years have passed since on your initiative we went to

Salzburg together, and in the splendid Abbey Church of St Peter heard Mozart's Mass in C minor. Even if I was only a simple youth at the time, I realized, with you, that we had experienced something other than a mere concert: it was music in prayer, a divine office in which we had felt the magnificence and beauty of God himself and were moved by it. After the war we returned several times to Salzburg to hear the C minor Mass and this is why it is deeply engraved in our joint inner biography. Tradition claims that Mozart composed this Mass to fulfil a vow in thanksgiving for his marriage to Constanze Weber. This also explains the important soprano solos which Constanze was to interpret as expressions of gratitude and joy *gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam* gratitude for God's goodness which had transported him. From a strictly liturgical viewpoint some might object that these great solos are somewhat removed from the sobriety of the Roman liturgy; yet on the other hand we may also ask: do we not perhaps hear in them the voice of the Bride, the Church, of which Bishop Gerhard Ludwig has just spoken? Is it not the Bride's voice that actually resounds in these solos both with her joy at being loved by Christ and with his own love, and thus brings us before God as a living Church in her gratitude and joy? To the grandeur of this music and this Mass, which go far beyond any individuality, Mozart entrusted his most personal gratitude. At this time, dear Georg, we have thanked God together in the harmony of this Mass for the 85 years of life that he has granted you. In the programme prepared for this concert, Professor Hommes has strongly emphasized that the gratitude expressed in this Mass is not a superficial gratitude impressed upon it lightly by a man of the Rococo age but, rather, that the full intensity of his inner strife was expressed in this Mass, his search for forgiveness, for God's mercy and then joy in God rises from these depths, more radiant than ever.

The 85 years of your life have not always been easy. You were born just after the inflation was over and people, including our parents, had lost all their savings. Then came the world financial crisis, the Nazi dictatorship, the war, prison. Later, with new hope and joy, in a Germany destroyed and drained of its blood, we set out on our way. And there was no lack of difficult, steep rock faces and dark passages but we always perceived the goodness of God who called and guided you. This double vocation, to music and to the priesthood, to the one that embraced the other, was manifest in you from the start, from very early on. And thus God guided your footsteps and you followed your path until Providence gave you the position in Regensburg with the *Regensburger Domspatzen* in which you were able to serve music as a priest and transmit to the world and to humanity joy in God's existence amid the beauty of music and song. There too you had troubles enough every trial calls for an effort, as we can guess and as we know further efforts were in store.... Then, however, when the choir was singing brilliantly and bringing God's joy and beauty to the world, everything was once again great and beautiful. Today, let us thank the good Lord, together with you, for this, for his Providence, and then let us thank you, for you have responded with all your strength, your discipline, your joy, your imagination and your creativity in these 30 years with the *Regensburger Domspatzen*, leading us ever anew to God.

Of course and above all we are also glad at this moment because although this choir the oldest

church choir in the world, that has sung God's praise for more than 1,000 years without interruption in the Cathedral of Regensburg uninterruptedly built up in this way, is still young and with youthful strength and beauty has sung praise of God for us and continues to exist. A cordial "*Vergelt's Gott*", to you, dear *Domspatzen* [choir members], to the choirmaster, to you all, and especially to the orchestra and soloists who have restored to us the original sound of Mozart's time. My cordial thanks to you all!

And because human life is always incomplete while we journey on, in all human gratitude there is always also expectation, hope and prayer; and thus let us pray the good Lord today, dear Georg, that he may grant you more good years in which you may continue to live the joy of God and the joy of music and in which you may continue to serve men and women as a priest. And let us pray him to grant all of us, one day, to enter the heavenly concert, to experience God's joy for ever.

As I also renew on behalf of the Italian-speaking guests my fervent thanks to the sponsors and organizers of this most beautiful initiative, I express the hope that the splendid music we have heard in the unique context of the Sistine Chapel may contribute to deepening our relationship with God and serve to revive in our hearts the joy that flows from faith, so that each one may become a convinced witness of it in the context of his own daily life. And of course, a big "thank you" to the Bishop and the Cathedral Chapter, and to all who contributed to arranging this concert. With these sentiments I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all with affection.

© Copyright 2009 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana