



The Holy See

CONCERT OFFERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF PONTIFICATE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Paul VI Audience Hall

Thursday, 5 May 2011

Mr President,

Your Eminences,

Honourable Ministers and Authorities,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again this year, to mark the beginning of my Pontificate, the President of the Italian Republic, the Honourable Giorgio Napolitano, with his customary perfect courtesy has wished to enable us to enjoy an uplifting musical moment. While I offer you and your gracious Lady, my heartfelt thanks, Mr President, I express my deep gratitude for this pleasurable tribute and for your cordial words; they demonstrate the closeness of the beloved Italian people to the Bishop of Rome and recall the unforgettable event of the [Beatification of John Paul II](#).

I also greet the other Authorities of the Italian State, the Ambassadors, the various important figures, the Municipality of Rome, and all of you. A special “thank you” goes to the conductor, the soloists, the orchestra and the choir of the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma for their splendid performance of the two masterpieces, one by Antonio Vivaldi and the other by Gioacchino Rossini, two supreme musicians, of whom Italy, which is celebrating the 150th anniversary of its political unity, can be proud. A “thank you” also goes to everyone who has made this event possible.

“Credo” and “Amen”: the two words at both the beginning and the end of the *Credo*, the Church’s “Profession of faith”, which we have heard. What does *credo* mean? It is a word that has various

meanings: it suggests receiving something from within one's own convictions, trusting someone, having assurance. When, however, we say it in the "Creed", it acquires a deeper meaning: it is affirming with trust the true meaning of the reality that sustains us, that sustains the world. It means accepting this meaning as the firm ground which we can stand on without fear; it is knowing that the foundation of all things cannot be made by us but only received.

And the Christian faith does not say "I believe in something", but rather, "I believe in Someone", in God who is revealed in Jesus; in him I perceive the world's true meaning. And this believing involves the whole person who is journeying on towards him. Moreover the word "Amen", which in Hebrew has the same root as the word "faith", takes up the same concept: confident reliance on the sound base of God.

And we come to the piece by Vivaldi, a great representative of 18th-century music in Venice. Unfortunately his sacred music — which is little known — contains precious treasures: we had an example of this in this evening's piece, most likely probably composed in 1715.

I would like to make three remarks. First of all, an anomalous factor in Vivaldi's vocal production: there are no soloists — there is only the choir. In this way Vivaldi wished to express the "we" of the faith. The "Credo" is the "we" of the Church which sings her faith, in space and in time, as a community of believers. When I say "credo" I do so inserted into the "we" of the community.

I would then like to point out the two splendid central movements: *Et incarnatus est* and *Crucifixus*. Vivaldi, as was the practice, dwells on the moment when God, who seemed remote, makes himself close, is incarnate and gives himself on the Cross. Here the repetition of words, the continuous modulations, convey the profound meaning of wonder before this Mystery and invite us to meditation and to prayer.

One last observation: Carlo Goldoni, a great exponent of the Venetian theatre, noted at his first meeting with Vivaldi: "I found him surrounded with music and with the Breviary in his hand". Vivaldi was a priest and his music sprang from his faith.

This evening's second masterpiece, the *Stabat Mater* by Gioacchino Rossini, is a great meditation on the mystery of the death of Jesus and on the profound sorrow of Mary. Rossini had ended the active phase of his career when he was only 37 years old, in 1829, with *William Tell*. From this moment he no longer wrote pieces of vast proportions, with only two exceptions, both sacred music: the *Stabat Mater* and the *Petite Messe solennelle*. Rossini's religious sense expressed a rich range of sentiments before the mysteries of Christ with a strong emotional tension. From the great initial fresco of the *Stabat Mater*, sorrowful and affectionate, to the passages in which the Rossinian and Italian lyrical quality emerges, but which are always dramatically tense, until the double final fugue with the powerful *Amen*, which expresses the firmness of faith, and the *In sempiterna saecula*, which seeks to convey the sense of eternity. However I think that the two

true pearls of this work are the two passages *a capella*, the *Eja mater fons amoris* and the *Quando corpus morietur*.

Here the Maestro returns to the lesson of the great polyphony with an emotional intensity that becomes heartfelt prayer: “When my body dies, grant that my soul may be granted the glory of Paradise”. At the age of 71, after composing the *Petite messe solonnelle*, Rossini wrote “Good Lord, now this poor Mass has ended.... You know well that I was born for comic opera! Not much knowledge, a little heart, that’s all. Therefore be blessed and obtain for me paradise” — a simple, genuine faith.

Dear friends, I hope that the pieces this evening have also nourished our faith. I renew my gratitude to the President of the Italian Republic, to the soloists, to the complexes of the Teatro dell’ Opera di Roma, to the conductor, to the organizers and to everyone present and I ask for remembrance in prayer for my ministry in the Lord’s vineyard. May he continue to bless you and your loved ones! Thank you.