



The Holy See

CONCERT OFFERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY,
Mr PAL SCHMITT, ON THE OCCASION OF HUNGARY'S PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
AND THE BICENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF FERENC LISZT

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
AT THE END OF THE CONCERT***

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Friday, 27 May 2011*

*Mr President of the Republic,
Your Eminences,
Hon. Ministers and Authorities,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I wish to address my respectful greeting to the President of the Republic of Hungary, Mr Pál Schmitt, to his wife and to the Hungarian Delegation. I thank him for the words he addressed to me and for very courteously offering us this splendid concert on the occasion of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the bicentenary of the birth of Franz Liszt, a truly European artist.

I greet the other Authorities, the Ambassadors, the various personalities and all of you. A special thanks goes to the conductor, to the tenor, to the National Philharmonic Orchestra and to the Hungarian National Chorus for an extremely high level performance, and to the organizers of this event.

Liszt, one of the greatest pianists of all time, was a genial composer of music not only for the piano but also of symphonic and sacred music, as we have just heard. I would like to propose a thought

that occurred to me while listening to the first three pieces: *Festmarsch zur Goethejubiläumsfeier*, the *Vallée d'Obermann* and the *Ave Maria-Die Glocken von Rom*. The first was adapted and the other two transcribed from piano by Maestro Kotschisch in Liszt's true spirit. In these three compositions the orchestra's whole range of tones is highlighted; therefore, we heard with clarity the particular voices of the various sections which form the structure of the orchestra: string, wind, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments, timbres which are very characteristic and diverse among themselves. Yet we did not hear an accumulation of disconnected sounds; all of these orchestral colours harmoniously expressed a single musical design, bestowing on us the beauty and joy of listening. They have excited in us a vast range of emotions: from the joy and festivity of the march, to the thoughtfulness of the second piece with its recurring and soulful melody, while the poignant *Ave Maria* instills a prayerful attitude.

A word also concerning the very beautiful Psalm 13 [12]. This piece dates back to the years in which Liszt stayed in Tivoli and Rome; it was a period when the composer lived his faith intensely, so much so that he almost exclusively wrote sacred music. Let us remember that he took minor orders. The piece which we have heard gives us an idea of the quality and depth of this faith. It is a Psalm in which the praying person is in a difficult situation, the enemy surrounds and besieges him, God seems absent and seems to have forgotten him. And his anguished prayer rises in the face of this situation of abandonment: "How long, O Lord", the Psalmist repeats four times. The tenor and the choir repeat "*Herr, wie lange?*", in an almost incessant way. It is the cry of man and of humanity that feels the weight of evil that is in the world. Liszt's music conveys to us this sense of heaviness and distress. But God does not abandon. The Psalmist knows this, Liszt does too; as a man of faith, he knows. From the anguish, a cry full of faith leading to joy is born: "My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me". Here Liszt's music transforms itself: the tenor, choir and orchestra raise an anthem full of confidence in God, who never betrays, never forgets, never leaves us by ourselves.

Regarding his *Missa Solemnis*, Liszt wrote: "I can truly say that I have prayed this mass more than I composed it". I think that we can say the same about this Psalm: the great Hungarian musician prayed more than he composed it, or even better, he prayed it before composing it.

I renew my gratitude to the President of the Republic, the conductor, the tenor, the National Philharmonic Orchestra and the Choir, to all the organizers, for having given us this moment in which our heart was invited to rise to the height of God.

May the Lord continue to bless your life. Thank you all.

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