



The Holy See

CONCERT OFFERED BY THE EMBASSY OF ITALY TO THE HOLY SEE
IN HONOUR OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
AND OF H.E. Mr GIORGIO NAPOLITANO, PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 84th ANNIVERSARY OF THE LATERAN PACTS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Monday, 4 February 2013*

[\[Video\]](#)

*Mr President of the Republic,
Dear Cardinals,
Honourable Ministers and Distinguished Authorities,
Venerable Brothers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

First of all, I greet Mr Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic, and thank him for the fervent words of goodwill he has addressed to me; over the past seven years — as he recalled — we have met several times and exchanged experiences and reflections. I greet his kind wife and the Italian authorities, as well as the Ambassadors and the many important figures present. I extend my heartfelt thanks to this evening's sponsors and organizers, in particular to the Flying Angels Foundation, which is involved in the field of solidarity.

The Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and Zubin Mehta, the conductor, need no introduction. They both have an important place in the international music scene, which tonight they have demonstrated by giving us a deeply uplifting spiritual moment with their remarkable

performance of the Overture from Verdi's opera and of Beethoven's Third.

Giuseppe Verdi's *The Force of Destiny* is a tribute due to the great Italian musician in the year when we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of his birth. What is striking in his works is his grasp of life's situations and his expression of them in music in such an immediate, decisive and essential way — especially the drama of the human soul — as is rarely found on the musical scene.

A tragic fate always befalls Verdi's characters and the protagonists of *The Force of Destiny* are no exception. This was made clear to us from the very first bars of the Overture which we have just heard. However, in addressing the theme of destiny, Verdi finds himself directly facing the subject of religion, having to reckon with God, with faith and with the Church. Here, once again, emerges this musician's spirit, his restlessness, his religious searching.

In *The Force of Destiny*, the heartfelt prayer of "The Virgin of the Angels" is not only one of the most famous arias but in it we also find two stories of conversion and of coming close to God: the story of Leonora, who dramatically acknowledges her faults and decides to withdraw to life as a hermit; and the story of Don Alvaro, who struggles between the world and a life in solitude with God. It is interesting to note that the endings vary in the two versions of this work: the 1862 version for St Petersburg and the 1869 version for La Scala in Milan. In the first version, Don Alvaro's life ends in suicide, after rejecting the religious habit and invoking hell; in the second version, however, he accepts the words of the Father Guardian, who tells him to trust in God's forgiveness, and the opera ends with the words "she [Leonora] has gone to God".

The drama of human existence, depicted here, is marked by a tragic destiny and by the yearning for God, for his mercy and his love, which offer illumination, meaning and hope, even in darkness. Faith offers us this prospect which is not an illusion but real; as St Paul says, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

This is the strength of Christians which comes from the death and Resurrection of Christ, from the supreme act of a God who entered human history not only with words, but by becoming incarnate.

I would also like to say a word on Beethoven's Third Symphony, a complex work that marks a clear departure from the classical symphonic music of Haydn and Mozart. As is well known, it was dedicated to Napoleon, but the great German composer changed his mind when Bonaparte proclaimed himself emperor, replacing the title with: "composed to celebrate the memory of a great man". Beethoven expressed in music the ideal of the hero — bringing freedom and equality — who must choose to resign or to fight, death or life, surrender or victory. The Symphony describes this state of mind rich in colour and themes hitherto unknown.

I shall not begin to interpret its four movements but will mention only the second, the famous Funeral March, a soulful meditation on death. It begins with a beginning section marked by dramatic and desolate tones, but in the central part which contains a serene interlude played by the oboe, and then the double fugue and trumpet blasts: the thought of death invites reflection on the afterlife, on the infinite. In those years Beethoven wrote in his *Heiligenstadt* testament of October 1802: "God looks into my heart, he searches it and knows that love for men and feelings of benevolence have their abode there". May the search for meaning that is part of humanity's journey open us to firm hope for the future.

Thank you, Mr President, for your attendance. My thanks to the Director and to the Professors of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Orchestra. My thanks also to the sponsors and organizers and to you all! Good evening!