

G. Verdi's setting of the Requiem Mass: text & translation.

REQUIEM æternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion, et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.

Exaudi orationem meam, ad te omnis caro veniet.

KYRIE ELEISON, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

DIES IRAE, dies illa, solvet sæclum in favilla: teste David cum Sibylla.

Quantus tremor est futurus, quando judex est venturus, cuncta stricte discussurus.

Tuba mirum spargens sonum per sepulcra regionum coget omnes ante thronum.

Mors stupebit et natura cum resurget creatura judicanti responsura.

Liber scriptus proferetur, in quo totum continetur, unde mundus judicetur.

Judex ergo cum sedebit, quidquid latet apparebit, nil inultum remanebit.

Quid sum miser tunc dicturus, quem patronem rogaturus, cum vix justus sit securus?

Rex tremendæ majestatis, qui salvandos salvas gratis, salva me, fons pietatis.

Recordare Jesu pie quod sum causa tuæ viæ, ne me perdas illa die.

Quærens me sedisti lassus, redemisti crucem passus: tantus labor non sit cassus.

Juste judex ultionis, donum fac remissionis ante diem rationis.

Ingemisco tanquam reus, culpa rubet vultus meus: supplicanti parce, Deus.

Qui Mariam absolvisti et latronem exaudisti, mihi quoque spem dedisti.

Preces meæ non sunt dignæ, sed tu, bonus, fac benigne, ne perenni cremer igne.

Inter oves locum præsta et ab hædis me sequestra statuens in parte dextra.

Confutatis maledictis, flammis acribus addictis, voca me cum benedictis.

Oro supplex et acclinis, cor contritum quasi cinis, gere curam mei finis.

Lacrymosa dies illa, qua resurget ex favilla

Judicandus homo reus. Huic ergo parce Deus.

PIE JESU Domine, dona eis requiem. Amen.

[OFFERTORIO] Domine Jesu Christe, Rex gloriæ,

Libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum de pœnis inferni et de profundo lacu.

Libera eas de ore leonis, ne absorbeat eas tartarus, ne cadant in obscurum.

Sed signifer sanctus Michael repræsentet eas in lucem sanctam,

quam olim Abrahæ promisisti et semini ejus.

Hostias et preces tibi, Domine, laudis offerimus:

Tu suscipe pro animabus illis quarum hodie memoriam facimus.

Fac eas, Domine, de morte transire ad vitam,

quam olim Abrahæ promisisti et semini ejus.

SANCTUS Sanctus Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth, pleni sunt cœli et terra gloria tua.

Osanna in excelsis!

BENEDICTUS qui venit in nomine Domini. Osanna in excelsis!

AGNUS DEI, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem sempiternam.

LUX ÆTERNA luceat eis, Domine, cum sanctis tuis in æternam, quia pius es.

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

LIBERA ME, Domine, de morte æterna in die illa tremenda,

Quando cœli movendi sunt et terra dum veneris judicare sæculum per ignem.

Tremens factus sum ego et timeo dum discussio venerit atque ventura ira.

Dies iræ, dies illa calamitatis et miseræ, dies magna et amara valde!

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

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Give them eternal rest, Lord, & may perpetual light illumine them.

To you a hymn is raised in Zion, O God, and to you the vow is fulfilled in Jerusalem.

Hear my request, as all flesh will come before you.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Day of wrath! That day dissolves the age to ash, as David and the Sibyl tell.

So much fear will there be when the Judge enters in strictly to examine all.

The trumpet, pouring wondrous sound throughout the districts of the dead, summons all before the throne.

Death and nature both are stunned when the creature's raised again to give answer to the Judge.

The decretal book is unsealed: in it all is contained by which the world is judged.

When, therefore, the Judge is seated, all that's hid will then appear, and naught will stay unpunished.

What shall I, a wretch, then say, what patron seek, when e'en the just be barely safe?

O King of awful majesty, who saves freely whom you will, save me, O Fount of compassion.

Recall, blessed Jesus, how I am the goal of your career, lest you destroy me on that day.

Seeking me, you stood firm to exhaustion; by suffering the cross, you ransomed me: may such labor not be vain!

O just Judge of vengeance, grant remission before the day of reckoning.

I groan at my indictment, my face reddens with guilt: spare the supplicant, O God.

You who absolved Mary and gave heed to the thief give hope to me as well.

My prayers are not worthy, but you, the Good, act kindly, lest I burn in everlasting fire.

Among the sheep place me and keep me from the goats, setting me on your right.

When the foul-mouthed are silenced, doomed to searing flames, summon me among the blessed.

I pray, knee bent, head bowed, a heart reduced to cinders: take care of me at my end.

Full of weeping is that day when from the ashes there does rise

The one accused, set for judgment. Therefore spare him, O our God.

O compassionate Lord Jesus, give them peace. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,

Free the souls of all the faithful dead from the punishment below and from the deep lake.

Free them from the mouth of the lion, lest Tartarus suck them down, lest they fall into the darkness.

Let, instead, Saint Michael the Standard Bearer place them into the holy light,

as you once promised to Abraham and his seed.

We offer to you, O Lord, sacrifices and prayers of praise:

accept them for these souls whom today we remember.

Make them, O Lord, cross over from death to life,

as you once promised to Abraham and his seed.

Holy Holy Holy Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world give them rest eternal.

May eternal light illumine them, O Lord, along with your saints forever, for you are faithful.

Give them eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light illumine them.

Free me, O Lord, from eternal death on that awful day,

When the heavens and earth shake while you come to judge the age with fire.

I will tremble and fear while the examination comes and the wrath that's due.

Day of wrath, that day of calamity and misery, great and so bitter day!

Give them, O Lord, eternal rest, and may perpetual light illumine them.

## G. Verdi's setting of the Requiem Mass: notes on the text.

*Te decet hymnus...caro veniet:* Ps. 65: 1-2 (64: 2-3 in Vulgate). Vows were important in Israelite religion, from Samson (Judges 13) to Paul (Acts 18); see Numbers 6. *Kyrie eleison:* these Greek words have been liturgical responses from the earliest traditions, and have passed into the liturgies of many lands and languages. The *Christe eleison* was added by the sixth century, perhaps in Rome.

The *Dies Irae* is at the heart of the Requiem mass, and it is one of the great religious poems of the Middle Ages, or of any time. The brilliant combination of imagery with meter and rhyme makes it next to impossible to translate adequately. Often but doubtfully attributed to Thomas of Celano (ca. 1190-1260), the friend and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi, the poem's origin among the earliest Franciscans is quite probable. This hymn reflects on the dreadful Day of the Lord as described by the prophet Zephaniah, providing a fine example of mediæval and Franciscan piety. The poet is caught between two poles: the immensity of God's justice and the immensity of God's mercy. The vision of the last day and God's strict final judgment fills him with fear, both because of the awesomeness of the event and because of his own soul's inadequacy. The poem's message is summed up in the lines *Quid sum miser...* and *Rex tremendæ...* In the face of God's justice, not even the righteous are secure by their own merits: there is no hope in self or friends, a dismaying fact. But the very God who is King of awful majesty is likewise the source of all mercy, who freely hands out salvation to the unworthy: *salva me, Fons pietatis!* The same God whose mighty presence frightens is also the God who absolved Mary Magdalene (Luke 8: 2, cf. 7: 37) and gave ear to the penitent thief (Luke 23: 40-43) and suffered on the cross to save sinners. The tension between God the Great and God the Good produces conflicting emotions in the poet's heart, so he abandons any hope in worldly defenses & gives himself over to the one who is his best and only hope.

The use of the *Dies Irae* as the sequence of the Requiem mass emerged only at the end of the fifteenth century. Early musical settings of the Requiem do not use the *Dies Irae* (omitted also in Fauré's and Duruflé's Requiems). Mozart's setting was the first large setting for concert instrumentation, a style that proved very fruitful in the nineteenth century: Berlioz; Cherubini; Dvorak; and Verdi, whose setting is the greatest.

David and the Sibyl: David's inspired Psalms were seen as prophetic books, and the Sibyl was the oracle of Rome. Around the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., many Sibylline "oracles" with Jewish and Christian interpolations were circulated, and they remained very popular. •Districts of the dead: a *regio* is an area or region, often with its populace, a borough, province, or district. •The decretal book: *liber scriptus: scriptus* carries additionally the thought of "official," hence the legal tone here and throughout the hymn. •*Quid sum miser:* a

startling shift to the first person (which Verdi marks by a reprise of the *Dies Irae*). We the audience stand with the dead before judgment. •Compassion: *pietas* and *pius* have wide but clear ranges of meanings. They describe the dutiful and devoted conduct of people to God and God's compassion and care in return, and also patriotism and family loyalty: i.e., all the good conduct expected within a loving and sacred relationship, which is a blessed state. •When e'en the just: *cum vix justus*. This recalls Proverbs 11: 31 in the Greek Septuagint translation, which is quoted in First Peter 4: 18. In the Latin Vulgate this is, *Et si justus vix salvatur, impius et peccator ubi parebit?* = "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?" Cf. I Peter 4: 16-19. •Awful majesty: *tremenda:* fearful, terrible, dread; *maiestas:* glory, dignity, majesty, authority. *Rex tremendus* is a title of Pluto in Latin authors. •Goal of career: *causa tuæ viæ:* the cause or point or reason of your way or road or journey.

•In seeking me, you stood firm to exhaustion: *quærens me sedisti lassus*. By themselves, *sedisti* = you sat; *lassus* = weary, exhausted. But *sedeo* can also mean, e.g., wait at a temple for the god's activity, or sit firm, determined. Given the context here, I interpret the two words to imply Jesus' determined presence in this world to the point of exhaustion. •Among the sheep: from Matthew 25: 31ff. •I pray, knee bent, head bowed, a heart reduced to cinders: *Oro supplex & acclinis: supplex* is on bended knee; *acclinis* is bent or bowed, so in this case of the neck. •The *Lacrymosa* couplet was added later, switching the voice from first person ("take care of me") to third person ("spare him") and returning us the audience to the role of observer.

The offertory has many biblical echoes, from Genesis to Revelation, woven throughout. Michael is the archangel, associated with aiding the faithful people in war and the faithful soul at death. The promise to Abraham is from Genesis 12 & 15, discussed by Paul in Galatians 3 & Romans 4. •*Sanctus:* based on the angelic hymn in Isaiah 6: 3, a verse used in many Jewish and Christian liturgies. •*Benedictus:* Matthew 21: 9, where the crowd greets Jesus entering Jerusalem, quoting Psalm 118 (117 in Vulgate): 26. •*Agnus Dei,* a variation, used in Requiems, from the familiar repeated form. Based on John 1: 29 and Isaiah 53: 7, the original form entered the Latin mass around 500 and began to be repeated around 1000.

The Requiem text moves from petition for the dead (*Libera eas, free them*) to praise (*Sanctus! Benedictus!*) then again to petition (including the refrain *Requiem æternam dona eis*). But set between the refrains is the *Libera me* (to which Verdi returns to end his setting), returning to the first person and once again involving us in the petition and asserting our solidarity with all humanity, the quick and the dead. *Ad te omnis caro veniet.*