



March 22, 2017

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST

The Seven Last Words of Christ by Théodore Dubois is an extraordinarily beautiful musical work. This Sunday morning, March 26, you will have the rare opportunity to experience this masterpiece, when our Chancel Choir and soloists will be joined by a full symphonic orchestra in presenting *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, in its entirety, as part of our regular worship service at 10:00 a.m.

In this magnificent musical setting, filled with soaring melodies and sublime harmonies, the words of Jesus are sung alternately by the baritone soloist (Garrett Murphy) and the tenor soloist (Christian Figueroa); the words of Jesus are often echoed by the choir. The soprano soloist (Laurie Stewart Otten) sings a moving text from the book of Lamentations as an Introduction to the dramatic movements which follow, and later is joined by the tenor soloist and choir in poignantly beautiful music which expresses the deep sorrow of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Twice, the choir takes on a startling role, representing at one point the angry mob shouting “Crucify him!” – and later, the scorners gathered at the base of the cross, taunting Jesus with the words, “If you are the Christ, save yourself! Come down from the cross, that we might believe you!”

The “Seven Last Words of Christ from the Cross” are seven statements uttered by Jesus during his crucifixion, as recorded in the Gospels. In the setting by Dubois, each statement (sung in Latin) is set as a separate movement:

1. *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.* (Luke 23:34)
2. *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.* (Luke 23:43)
3. *Woman, behold your son.* (John 19:26)
4. *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)
5. *I thirst.* (John 19:28)
6. *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.* (Luke 23:46)
7. *It is finished.* (John 19:30)

Dubois skillfully uses the large orchestra to dramatically enhance each text. In the *Introduction*, trombones and timpani (kettle-drums) evoke an atmosphere of quiet solemnity. Flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, French horns, trumpets, strings, and organ provide richly

varied sonorities to create an unparalleled musical texture; the ethereal sound of the harp is heard in the most serene passages.

One of the most dramatic moments occurs in the final movement. After we hear the words of Jesus (“It is finished”), the tenor soloist sings of the tumultuous events which immediately followed the death of Jesus: the rending of the temple veil, the darkening of the sky, the violent earthquake. The orchestra erupts into a brief interlude depicting the earthquake, complete with thunderous outbursts from the timpani. After the sounds of the earthquake subside, Dubois ends the work with a simple prayer, sung by the choir in exquisitely pure harmonies: “We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee, for by the holy cross thou hast redeemed the world.”

The members of our Chancel Choir and I hope you will be with us this Sunday morning, March 26, at 10:00 a.m. to experience the glorious music of Dubois’s *The Seven Last Words of Christ*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Finney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

John Finney,
Director of Music