

AVE VERUM CORPUS, K.618

W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Jesus, The Son Of God

Jesus, the Son of God,
came to earth to save the world.
God's only Son was rebuked and despised.
Though He healed the sick,
forgave sins and showed God's love,
was tried, found guilty
and condemned to death.
He was crucified,
suffered hate and scorn.
Yet He asked God to forgive our sins.
Then He died,
was buried in a tomb,
but rose again after three days,
now to live for evermore,
glorified with God in heav'n
upon His throne.

Evermore glorified with God in heav'n
upon His throne.

Adrian Vermeulen-Miller

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Jezus, De Zoon Van God

Jezus de Zoon van God,
kwam om ons te redden.
God's eigen Zoon werd versmaad en gehoond.
Zonden Hij vergaf, zieken Hij genas
en bracht God's liefde op deez' aard'
voor iedereen.
Toch werd Hij versmaad
en veroordeelt tot Zijn kruis.
Zelfs toen vroeg Hij voor vergeving voor ons.
Jezus stierf voor ons en daalde neer in 't graf,
herrees de derde dag
en leeft nu voor eeuwig,
thuis bij God, hoog in de Hemel
op Zijn eigen troon.

Thuis bij God, hoog in de Hemel,
op Zijn eigen troon.

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April of 1791, Leopold Hofmann, who was *Kapellmeister* at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, fell gravely ill. Mozart, who had never been an avid composer of sacred music, nonetheless saw an opportunity to enhance his income, and maneuvered to succeed Hofmann. Towards this end, he turned his attentions again to sacred music, culminating ultimately with his *Requiem*. (As it happens, Hofmann survived Mozart, and died in 1793.)

Mozart set the Eucharistic hymn *Ave verum corpus* in June 1791. This setting was dedicated to his friend, Anton Stoll, who was chorus master of the parish church in Baden, and it was first performed in Baden at the Feast of Corpus Christi.

It is possible that Mozart set this hymn, mindful of the Imperial ban on elaborate concerted music, or it is possible that he was working with the limitations of Stoll's choir. One way or another, his setting is remarkable for its compact simplicity. There are a mere forty-six bars of music, with orchestral writing that serves to provide introduction, transition, and ending, and double the choral parts. The choral setting is simplicity itself, with the choir mostly singing the same text at the same time. This direct approach would suited a reform-minded Austria where textual clarity and brevity were all-important in church music.

Mozart's setting is far from pedestrian or undistinguished. (It actually isn't even complete; the text below includes the last two verses, which Mozart omitted from his setting.) There is an unusual modulation from D major to F major at the text, "whose side was pierced, whence flowed water and blood," and the simplicity is the sort that Artur Schnabel famously described as too simple for children and too difficult for adults (after all, simple music like this exposes any lapses of rhythm, intonation, or ensemble). And the music seems to encompass a universe of feeling in forty-six short bars.

Ave/verum/Corpus/natum/de/Maria/Virgine: *Hail/true/Body/of/Mary/virgin*

Vere/passum/immolatum/in/cruce/pro/homine: *truly/suffered/was sacrificed/on/cross/for mankind*

Cujus/latus/perforatum/unda/fluxit/et/sanguine: *Whose/side/was pierced/from where/water/flowed and blood*

Esto/nobis/praegustatum/in/mortis/examine. *be /for us/foretaste/in/of death/testing*

O Jesu dulcis, o Jesu oie, o Jesu Fili Mariae, miserere mei. Amen

Hail, true Body, born of the virgin Mary,
Who has truly suffered and was sacrificed on the cross for mankind,
whose side was pierced, whence flowed water and blood,
be for us a foretaste of heaven, during our final trial,
o Jesu sweet, o Jesu merciful, o Jesus Son of Mary, have mercy on me. Amen