

## Music Notes 2017 – The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Trinity XIII is roughly half way through the Sundays after Trinity. The Church has handed down to us two half years with very different rhythms. The first half, which begins on Advent Sunday, is full of incident and narrative. Christ's coming is foretold, and after a few short weeks of preparation (just three this year!), he is born, visited by shepherds and then by wise men from the east. Almost before we can catch our breath, we are being entreated to repent in Lent. In brisk succession follow Passiontide, Holy Week, crucifixion, burial and the Resurrection of Easter. After a few short weeks, Ascensiontide, Pentecost and Trinity come upon us. As it so happens, we then also mark Corpus Christi on a Sunday, stealing the thunder from the First Sunday after Trinity, and this 'marks' the end of the first half. The second is not like unto it. Instead, we have a long series of mainly numbered Sundays, during which we concentrate upon the other aspects of Christian life and doctrine, with only the occasional festival to disturb this less frenetic ticking of the liturgical clock. For a brief period, a few decades back, the Church of England used to count these as Sundays after Pentecost, mimicking what had been Roman Catholic practice. Eventually, we returned to the structure that had been in place since the Reformation, and reverted to numbering Sundays after Trinity once more.

Mid-way through this second cycle, and without a particular liturgical peg on which to hang a choice of mass setting, this week we will be hearing a mass, *Missa Dum complerentur dies Pentecostes*, which is based on a motet of the same name for the Feast of Pentecost. Both motet and mass setting are by the Spanish composer, Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548–1611). The text describes the disciples gathering in a house where the sound of rushing wind and the appearance on their heads of tongues of fire precedes their being filled with the Holy Spirit. Victoria's colourful musical language is used to good effect in this motet, and he was sufficiently pleased with it – not necessarily a given for this deeply self-critical composer – that he used it as the basis also for the parody mass setting of the same name. This term means that the composer uses chunks of the motet to start or 'spark' each section of the mass. To explain this another way, he quotes from his earlier inspiration in order to provide the fundamental motivic material, which he then develops further. From this we can see that composers saw the character of a new piece as inheriting meaning from the earlier piece, so that a Pentecost motet as it were "touched" the mass setting that quoted from it and made it also a Pentecost setting. Moreover, we can see the beginnings of the concept of elaborating from the cell of a musical idea, which has been a significant feature of western classical music ever since.

Victoria is, of course, one of the great trio of composers from this era, all of whom knew each other. His surviving output is the least of that left by the great trio of Renaissance composers: Palestrina (1525–1594) comes next in quantity, while Lassus (1530–1594) was compositionally highly loquacious. Assailed by self-doubt, we can

suppose that Victoria composed more works than we now have, but often found some wanting and destroyed them. He quite likely studied with Palestrina after going to live and work in Rome when he was about sixteen, and he remained there for twenty years. When he returned to Spain, it was to be the Chaplain (he had been ordained in the meantime) and Maestro of the Convent choir to the Dowager Empress Maria of Austria, whose demise in 1603 evoked his stunning and powerful *Requiem Mass*.

Victoria's motet was written for five voices – possibly a reference to “Pentecost”: “Fiftieth Day”. The mass, however, is for six voices, although Victoria uses a number of different combinations of the available singers for sub-sections of the movements. When it comes to the second time through the *Agnus Dei* (actually strictly speaking the third – the first or second would have been sung to chant), he follows the usual pattern of adding an extra voice to enrich the texture for that final plea that ends in *dona nobis pacem*. We forget, perhaps, in the silvery beauty of the music of this period, that life was dangerous, brutal and short, and that the European political sphere was often unstable and risky, as it would remain until the post-Second World War creation of a new approach to European governance. We might think of *dona nobis pacem* in abstract terms – personal peace – or we might bring Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, or a host of other places, including Israel and North Korea into our minds when we hear, sing or say these words. The way that composers went out of their way to make this final appeal bear an added lustre and richness is perhaps not just a means of making the ending special, but also a sign of just how greatly people feared the absence of peace and the destructive effects of war.

The motet at the Offertory is *Ego sum panis vivus* by the Spanish composer Juan de Esquivel Barahona (c.1560–after 1625). This is, as the name suggests, actually a work intended for the Feast of Corpus Christi, so this morning's music is really looking back towards the last weeks of the “first half” of the liturgical year. Still, any music for that Feast is always appropriate to any mass.

Esquivel (as he is usually known) was a choirboy in the cathedral of Ciudad Rodrigo. In those years, it is reported plausibly – although the evidence is just from one unsubstantiated source – Esquivel studied with the Choirmaster, Juan Navarro (c.1530–1580), who was a very well-respected and successful choir director and composer. Esquivel also went into cathedral music employment, but not without difficulty: he signed a contract to become Maestro de Capilla at Oviedo, only to find that the cathedral authorities had also offered the job to someone else. Esquivel decided to stand his ground, and the case ran from May to November, at the end of which the contract was confirmed and Esquivel installed, serving from 1581–1585. There is some evidence – and always a likelihood in this context – that he was also ordained during his years at Oviedo. At the end of 1585 he went to serve as Maestro de Capilla at the cathedral at Calahorra. This seems not to have been a wholly happy

appointment either, and there is the curious biographical detail that he was hauled up for claiming that a choirboy was ill when this was not the case – although he was also let off paying the fine due for this minor infraction. Anyway, the lure of his home city was great, and in 1591 he returned to Ciudad Rodrigo to occupy the position formerly occupied by his (presumed) teacher Juan Navarro.

Somewhat surprisingly – because this was not so common at this time – Esquivel managed to have three volumes of his music published, probably thanks to the influence of his patron, the Dominican Pedro Ponce de León, Bishop of Ciudad Rodrigo. Two contain primarily masses (although the second is a somewhat eclectic mixture of complete masses and parts of masses), while the third is a collection of motets for the church's year, including this Sunday's motet. This is music from the most highly developed Spanish Renaissance tradition, of great elegance, building on the tradition of the masters who came before him, such as Morales (c.1500–1553) and Guerrero (1528–1599) – especially the latter, whose motets feature often as the source of Esquivel's parody masses. *Ego sum panis vivus* is a beautiful example of his musical language, starting with deceptive simplicity but rapidly broadening into a beautifully rich language, with some interesting turns of harmony, and a very jolly set of Alleluias at the end.

The canticles at Evensong are *The Jesus College Cambridge Service* by the Welsh composer, William Mathias (1934–1992), which was commissioned by and first performed at Jesus College, Cambridge, on the occasion of the dedication of the new organ on 6 March 1971. A student of Lennox Berkeley (1903–1989), Mathias was for many years a Professor and Head of the Department of Music at University College of North Wales, Bangor. He was, very sadly, carried off by cancer at much too young an age, having retired from university life only four years previously in order to concentrate on his very successful composing work. The music of many composers goes into a substantial eclipse after they are no longer personally present to inspire interest in it, even if there is a publisher doing its best to prevent this from happening. But much of Mathias's church music has remained very resiliently part of the repertoire. It tends to be full of energy (rather like its composer, who was famous for his boisterousness) and drama, with vivid, edgy harmonies that characterize his texts joyously, with a highly characteristic rhythmic approach that is unique to Mathias.

*Magnificats* often seem to fall into two types: those that emphasize the femininity and maidenly qualities of the Blessed Virgin – Howells (1892–1983) is rather fond of doing this – and those that are instead excited by her ecstatic utterance and the emotional vividness of the words. This setting falls into the latter category. It is certainly no shrinking violet of a Mary who is speaking. Rather, we are presented with someone who has been seized by the wonder of her Annunciation and declaims and proclaims the message she has received. The setting begins with the organ, which leaves us in no doubt that this is going to be a high energy occasion. The first lines are assertive

and forceful, but then comes a quiet, reflective, berceuse-like treatment of the words *For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden*. This becomes a pattern: forceful declamatory sections followed by quieter, more reflective moments. However, although the latter may start gently, Mathias cannot resist the power of the ideas in the text, and the temperature starts to rise almost at once until the next declamatory section bursts in again. In the *Gloria*, the choir sings a broad unison line against a toccata-like accompaniment from the organ.

The *Nunc Dimittis* begins with the unaccompanied choir softly declaiming the text in close, mystical harmony. Of course, this is also a text that is engaged in an emotional crescendo from the peace of *now lettest thou thy servant depart up to the light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel*. The *Gloria* from the *Magnificat* seems to make a return, but now consciously underpowered, and with a completely different, quiet and thoughtful ending. The whole setting is wonderful: thrilling, exciting, thought-provoking – and it makes a very compelling case for why so much of Mathias's music has remained in the repertoire.

The anthem is *The Lord is my Shepherd* by Mathias's teacher, Lennox Berkeley. A somewhat complex character, Berkeley famously conceived an immense (if probably unrequited) passion for the young Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) before Britten and Peter Pears began their life-long personal union in 1942. Berkeley became a Roman Catholic in 1928, and in 1946 he surprised his friends by marrying. One wonders if this was at least in part due to a conflict between his sexual feelings and his church's position on sexuality, or perhaps he just had a fundamental need for conventional patterns of life. This surprise notwithstanding, his marriage was in fact a very happy one. Indeed, one of the Berkeleys' sons is the composer Michael Berkeley (b.1948), who, as Lord Berkeley of Knighton, is only the second composer ever to have been elevated to the peerage, the first having been his godfather, Benjamin Britten. Lennox Berkeley became Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music, a position that enabled him to exercise a great deal of influence on younger British composers. He himself did not stay static in his compositional style, and experimented widely throughout his career.

This anthem is a setting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, written for the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1975 of the founding of Chichester Cathedral, and dedicated to its remarkable Dean, Walter Hussey, who was so immensely influential as a commissioner of music and art both at St Matthew's Northampton and as Dean of Chichester. To him we owe Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, William Walton's (1902–1983) *Chichester Service* and Bernstein's (1918–1990) *Chichester Psalms*, as well as works by Graham Sutherland, John Piper, Geoffrey Clarke, Cecil Collins, Ceri Richards and Marc Chagall, among many, in a beautiful ecclesiastical setting. The anthem is set for soprano solo, four-part chorus and organ, and is a beautiful and elegant setting of the words.