

“An Audience of One”



“Peace”

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **PEACE**, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

Galatians 5:22-23

As this time of social distancing and sheltering-in-place extends into the second month, many in our world are longing for peace. This image is of Andrea Bocelli singing *Amazing Grace* in the courtyard of an empty Roman Cathedral on Easter Sunday. It is one of the many powerful COVID-19 images of everyday life in these changing times that will remain with me for years to come. This powerful image speaks volumes about God’s empowering Spirit of peace shining forth from the life of an ordinary man trying his best to cope with this unprecedented crisis.

On Easter Sunday, 2020, houses of worship all over the world were empty. For centuries, crowds have gathered in places of worship on this most holy day of the year to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago following his crucifixion on a Roman cross outside the city of Jerusalem. However, this past Easter Sunday, churches were empty.

On Easter Sunday afternoon, the Italian opera singer, Andrea Bocelli, livestreamed a 25-minute video *Music for Hope* concert from Milan’s historic Duomo Cathedral. The cathedral was empty. Bocelli, who was accompanied by organist Emanuele Vianelli, crafted and arranged a special set for the event and included holy songs such as *Ave Maria*, *Sancta Maria* and *Amazing Grace*. Bocelli received the invitation to perform *Music for Hope* from the mayor of Milan and the authorities of the church. He shared his excitement in a clarifying statement, “*I’m very happy to do this. It is not a performance. It is not a concert. It is only a prayer. I will go there to pray, and*

I'd like to think that everyone listening to me sing can pray with me." Bocelli sings his "prayer" to an audience of one...in heaven.

Bocelli's "Music for Hope — Live from Duomo di Milano" is one of the greatest musical livestream performances of all time on the YouTube platform. The performance reached the number 1 spot on YouTube's trending charts in multiple countries, including the U.S., U.K., Italy, Canada, Spain and throughout Latin America, including Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Colombia. Bocelli said in a statement. *"It was an immeasurable honor and privilege to lend my voice to the prayers of millions of people, gathered in a single embrace — a small, great miracle of which the whole world was the protagonist and which confirms my optimism about the future of our planet."*

As I sat in silence and listened to one man's prayer on Easter Sunday, I knew instantly that I was not part of his audience. Instead, I was praying with him, and millions of others, to an audience of one in heaven. True worship. In these unprecedented times of anguish and tragedy, I was longing for peace in my life and in our world. I was not alone in that longing. On this COVID-19 Easter Sunday, I experienced an overwhelming sense of...peace.

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. However, "peace" is only one small part of the meaning. "Shalom" comes from the root verb meaning to complete. Shalom is more than the absence of conflict; it is the feeling of fullness and richness of life. Shalom is an experience of contentment, completeness, wholeness, well-being and harmony. To his disciples hiding behind locked doors on the day of the resurrection, the first word the risen Jesus spoke was, "Shalom" (John 20:19). Jesus offered peace to his followers who were sheltering-in-place! He still does today.

The great Apostle Paul, writing from a Roman prison, teaches us that heartfelt prayers offered in worship to an audience of one in heaven usher in God's shalom.

***Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the SHALOM of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:6-7)***

I invite you to take 25 minutes out of your day, find a quiet place in a comfortable chair and join in the chorus of millions of Easter people around the world in singing with Andrea Bocelli to an audience of one in heaven. Please click on the link below. I will always remember Easter Sunday, 2020, as the time when houses of worship all over the world were empty...or were they?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huTUOek4LgU>