

Cantata for the Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity, November 5, 1724

1. Choral

*Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit,
Wache, fleh und bete,
Daß dich nicht die böse Zeit
Unverhofft betrete;
Denn es ist
Satans List
Über viele Frommen
Zur Versuchung kommen.*

2. Arie A

Ach schläfrige Seele, wie? ruhest du noch?
Ermuntre dich doch!
Es möchte die Strafe dich plötzlich erwecken
Und, wo du nicht wachest,
Im Schläfe des ewigen Todes bedecken.

3. Rezitativ B

Gott, so vor deine Seele wacht,
Hat Abscheu an der Sünden Nacht;
Er sendet dir sein Gnadenlicht
Und will vor diese Gaben,
Die er so reichlich dir verspricht,
Nur offene Geistesaugen haben.
Des Satans List ist ohne Grund,
Die Sünder zu bestrecken;
Brichts du nun selbst den Gnadenbund,
Wirst du die Hülfe nie erblicken.
Die ganze Welt und ihre Glieder
Sind nichts als falsche Brüder;
Doch macht dein Fleisch und Blut hiebei
Sich lauter Schmeichelei.

4. Arie S

*Bete aber auch dabei
Mitten in dem Wachen!*
Bitte bei der großen Schuld
deinen Richter um Geduld,
Soll er dich von Sünden frei
Und gereinigt machen!

5. Rezitativ T

Er sehnet sich nach unserm Schreien,
Er neigt sein gnädig Ohr hierauf;
Wenn Feinde sich auf unsern Schaden freuen,
So siegen wir in seiner Kraft:
Indem sein Sohn, in dem wir beten,
Uns Mut und Kräfte schafft
Und will als Helfer zu uns treten.

6. Choral

*Drum so laßt uns immerdar
Wachen, flehen, beten,
Weil die Angst, Not und Gefahr
Immer näher treten;
Denn die Zeit
Ist nicht weit,
Da uns Gott wird richten
Und die Welt vernichten.*

1. Chorale

*Prepare yourself, my spirit,
watch, plead, and pray
that the evil time not
come upon you unexpectedly.
For it is
Satan's cunning
that overcomes many righteous people
with temptation.*

2. Aria A

Ah, slumbering soul, what? Are you still resting?
Arouse yourself now!
Judgment might suddenly awaken you
and, if you are not watching,
cover you in the sleep of eternal death.

3. Recitativo B

God, who watches over your soul,
Abhors sin's night.
He sends you His light of grace
and wants—in return for these gifts,
which He so richly promises you—
only that your spiritual eyes be open.
Satan's cunning exists, without reason,
to entrap sinners;
if you yourself now break the covenant of grace,
you will never see help.
The whole world and all its members
are nothing but false brothers;
yet your own flesh and blood seeks from them
nothing but flattery.

4. Aria S

*Pray nevertheless also
during your vigil!*
Ask, in your great guilt,
patience from your Judge,
so that He will make you free from sin
and purify you!

5. Recitativo T

He harkens to our cries,
He bends His gracious ear to them;
when enemies rejoice over our misfortune,
then we triumph in His might:
since His Son, in Whom we pray,
gives us courage and strength
and as our Savior, treads toward us.

6. Chorale

*Therefore let us always
Watch, plead, and pray
since fear, need, and danger
ever nearer come;
for the time
is not far
when God will judge us
and destroy the world.*

Chorale v1

Lk 21:36 Watch ye therefore,
and pray always...

Chorale v2 paraphrase

1 Thessalonians 5:2 ... the day
of the Lord so cometh as a thief
in the night.... 6 Therefore let us
not sleep, as do others; but let
us watch and be sober.

Chorale v3-6 paraphrase

Chorale v7

Chorale v8-9 paraphrase

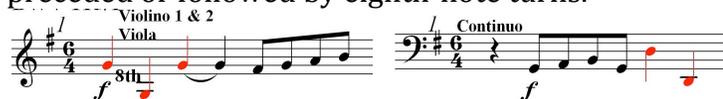
Chorale v10

Lk 21:36
Watch ye therefore, and pray
always, that ye may be
accounted worthy to escape all
these things that shall come to
pass, and to stand before the
Son of man.

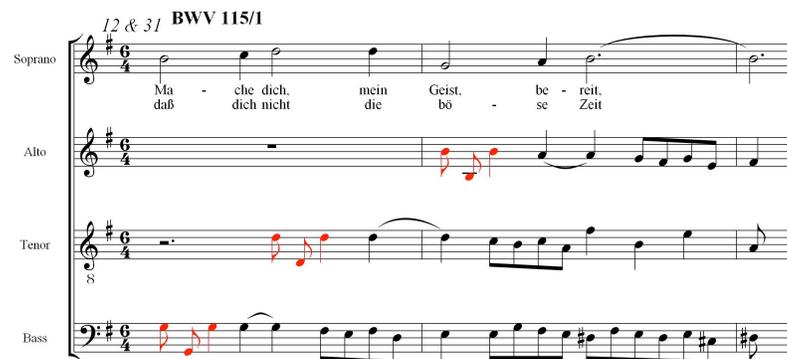
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BWV 115 *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, a chorale cantata for the Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity, was first performed on November 5, 1724. Both chorale text and melody were contemporary for Bach, first published in the last decade of the 17th century. Bach set the first and last verses as opening and closing movements with the remaining 8 verses (except for a brief quote from verse 7) paraphrased. The entire libretto is an exhortation to the Faithful to “watch, plead, and pray” lest they be tempted by Satan and find themselves unprepared for Judgment Day.

The music for the opening chorale fantasy counterbalances the somber text. In a danceable 6/4 meter in G major, the ritornello opens with spare two-part counterpoint—continuo and upper strings—and moves into a double canon by adding flute and oboe d’amore. The basic motif is an octave leap either preceded or followed by eighth-note turns.



When the voices enter, the orchestra continues its independent dance as the soprano lines out the *cantus firmus* and the lower voices work the orchestra motif contrapuntally:



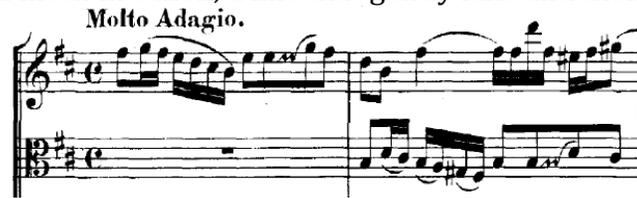
Three times—at the end of each *stollen* and at the end of the *abseingang*—Bach sends the lower voices through darker shifting harmonies, as if the Faithful were alternating the exuberance of anticipation and the uncertainty of the outcome.

The first aria (#2), a *siciliano* in 3/8, might be a lullaby with its pulsing eighth notes in the continuo under a sweet lilting melody for the oboe d’amor and first violin. But when the alto enters, she will be scolding the slumbering soul for its lack of vigilance, and Bach signals this warning with a soft dissonance on the very first beat: a d#⁹ chord with the 9th in the continuo:

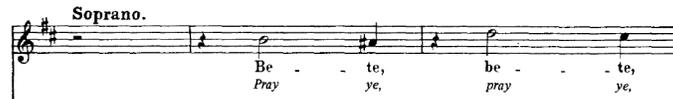


The B section begins in an agitated allegro and the alto warns of the “sudden punishment” that may come with lack of vigilance. Then a long (14-measure) melisma on “watch” returns abruptly to the sleepy adagio and the warning becomes explicit: careless sleep can become the sleep of death. John Elliot Gardiner suggests that we hear the singer as both the slumbering soul and the admonishing observer, the Faithful simultaneously passively waiting and engaged in the need for vigilance.

If the first aria urges the Faithful to watch, the second aria (#4) advises prayer. A flute and cello piccolo introduce the graceful motif in canon, a line that gently falls and then rises in leaps of a sixth.



When the soprano enters, she will continue this motif throughout the aria. But first she sings an anguished cry for prayer, a motif that seems to come from elsewhere:



These four notes echo a motif that Bach used a number of times when setting the chorale *Nun komm der heiden heiland*. While the original chorale is diatonic, his 1714 setting of it (BWV 61) introduced the chromatic alteration:

Nun komm der heiden Heiland chorale

BWV 61 *Nun komm der heiden Heiland* (Advent cantata)



During his Leipzig years, Bach set the chorale both ways. BWV 62, an Advent cantata for 1725, uses the diatonic version; BWV 36, an Advent cantata for 1731 that includes the *Nun komm* chorale, uses the chromatic as do two of the three the organ preludes from the *Eighteen Chorales* (1740s). The motif also appears in the *Saint Matthew Passion* in the chorus, “Lass ihn kreuzigen (Let him be crucified)”:



I think the motif had to have special meaning for Bach. Anticipating the birth of Christ (Advent), preparing for Judgment Day, the crucifixion—Bach surely chose this brief motif for its theological overtones as well as its exquisite beauty.

The recitative that links the two arias offers the Faithful the choice between God’s mercy and Satan’s cunning. The recitative that follows the second aria assures the Faithful that God not only hears their prayers but also assists them through His power. This second recitative ends with an arioso, a twisting melisma on the word “tread” (as in Jesus treading surely toward the Faithful) over a steady walking cadence that then echoes the vocal twist for the cadence.

The closing chorale predicts the end of the world, but the Faithful, understanding the power of watching, pleading and praying, sing with assurance that God will bring them through.