

## Prayer of the month • April 2010

O God,  
give me strength to be victorious over myself,  
for nothing may chain me to this life.  
O guide my spirit,  
O raise me from these dark depths,  
that my soul, transported through your wisdom,  
may fearlessly struggle upward in fiery flight.  
For you alone understand  
and can inspire me.

Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770–1827

The author admits to being in ‘dark depths’ – admitting where we are is the best start in prayer. Beethoven had just come to the realisation that his deafness was incurable. He was only 32 and music was his life – the phrase ‘dark depths’ is no overstatement. He cannot overcome his deafness, but God can help him to overcome himself – the depression and despair – and so to rise above his suffering. He cannot physically rise, but his spirit can, with God’s help. No-one can appreciate fully what he feels, this consummate musician from whom music itself is being taken away. He is entering a dark world where the music in his head can only be communicated silently. And yet, God does understand, he believes, and God can still inspire him. A prayer that begins in despair ends on a note of hope.

Beethoven had composed and published his first piece of music before he was twelve. Music was his language – he had never been a very sociable person. His deafness could have brought to an end his musical career. And yet we know that most of the musical works for which he is famous were composed after this moment. Perhaps we can discern something of his idea of ‘fiery flight’ in the works he went on to write. On the evidence of our own ears, we can believe that this prayer was answered and that he continued to be inspired until he died, twenty-five years later, on 26 March 1827.

Colin Lunt