



THOU holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. 5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. 6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. (Psalm 77:4-6)

In the Pianura Padana Valley of northern Italy sits a small town on the left bank of the Po River named Cremona. Cremona sits about 50 miles south of the Swiss border and is a center those who love great music. There is not much to remark about the city except its character and reputation borne out of centuries of the making of wonderful stringed instruments. But as is often the case, the outward architecture and street system of a city may hide some wonderful quality of heart that may be missed by the casual observer.

The strength of Cremona is, indeed, nestled in its heart, and hearts of many great people who have made the city to feel love and enjoy music.

About four centuries ago, there was a poor lad who lived in Cremona. He had no pastime other than carving and whittling with his knife. He loved music, but, unfortunately, had no talent to either sing or play and instrument.

One hot summer day as he sat whittling on a piece of wood, his friends came by and greeted him with a tease. "Say, Antonio – you with the squeaky voice! We are going down to the plaza to play my violin and sing for donations. We know you cannot sing, but why not come along. You love to whittle, but that can wait. You might help to take up donations from the people!"

Antonio was happy to have some place to go, and friends with whom to play. He went with his friends.

Once in the plaza, one of his friends played the violin (actually quite well) as the other sang a wonderful Italian melody. Soon a crowd had gathered. Antonio was busy picking up coins that were tossed before the group. This became a regular event on hot, steamy afternoons. Antonio was always there even if he could not contribute to the musical fare.

One afternoon on a clear and unusually cool day, the little band was at it again on the plaza. An elderly man passed that way almost daily and had watched as these

enterprising young fellows made entertaining music on an otherwise dull afternoon. He had watched each day that he passed and seen how the two musicians very artfully produced music in a city square devoid of any other mentionable events. But he wondered about the young lad who never sang or played a musical instrument. As he was passing, he stopped and watched with greater attention than usual. He called Antonio aside and asked him, "Why do you never perform with your friends instead of simply collecting the donations?"

"Well, sir," responded Antonio, "I have no voice for singing; and I cannot play an instrument – but I love music. I love to hear it being produced from the violin, and I also enjoy hearing my friend put words to the music. The only thing that I can do is carve objects out of wood, but that produces no music."

The old man's name was Nicolo Amati – a famous violin maker of Cremona during the mid sixteen hundreds. One of his violins today would sell for more than half a million dollars.

"Come with me and I will teach you to make beautiful music," said Amati. Amati was a great producer of violins of the finest woods, and he was, as well an outstanding teacher. Antonio, on the other hand, was a dedicated and earnest student. When you mix those two qualities of a great teacher and an avid student, something good must come out of the mixture.

Antonio learned to make stringed instruments such as harps, guitars, violas, cellos, and violins. But he was most noted for the latter – the Violin.

He became an amazing creator of violins, and his fame in the art was heralded around the world. His violins gave off a glorious sound that surpassed every other violin. The secret of his amazing art is still a mystery. Some believe that the Croatian wood he used gave out a richer and deeper sound due to its higher density than other woods. Scientists have discovered traces of copper and zinc in the wood and opine that this might be the secret of the beauty of the violin's notes. (National Taiwan University Study).

Another study conducted by the French chemist, Jean-Philippe Echard, suggest that the secret of the violins produced by Antonio may lie in the varnishes used. Echard claims that even after the varnish has worn away, traces of it may still be found in the cells near the surface of the wood. But NOBODY knows.

One thing is certain: Antonio loved the music produced by the violin. He placed that love into the heart of each of his productions. One could not tell the difference in one of his violins and any other produced in that era simply by appearance. It was the resonating notes that emanated from deep within the violin that revealed the touch of the Master's Hand – much like those who follow Christ and are claimed by Him as His elect. They do not have some special feature of face or body that identify them as Christians. It is the beauty that emanates from the deep chambers of their hearts that differentiate them from the people of the world.

There was nothing very special about Antonio, either, except that he loved to make wood carvings and loved music. He could neither sing or play, but when God joins love to a talent, it is surprising what result may follow. *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.* (Matt 12:35)

Antonio produced his last violin near the time of his death in 1737, but there are still many of his violins that are in great demand today. One of his violins recently sold at auction to raise money for the tsunami victims of Japan for 3.6 million dollars. Another, called the Lord Byron, sold for 15.9 million dollars.

“What is in a name?” Shakespeare asked. Well, much according to Scripture. *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.* (Prov 22:1)

Antonio had a good name that reflected perfection in skill and art. His last name, in case you haven't guessed, was STRADIVARIUS – the greatest name in violins!