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**ITALIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE COMMITTEE of NEW YORK  
LAUNCHES DANTE DAY**  
**DANTE 700**  
**March 25, 2021**



Apr. 01 Following the 2020 Italian cabinet's approval of Minister of Culture Dario Franceschini's proposal to establish an annual national 'Dantedì' (Dante Day) on March 25<sup>th</sup>, Dante was celebrated throughout the world this year. This is the presumed date when Dante Alighieri, medieval poet and philosopher, began the journey in his epic poem the *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy).

Dante Day was commemorated by the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York, Inc. (IHCC-NY), in collaboration with the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute and the Consulate General of Italy in New York, with a ceremony and wreath laying at the Dante statue at Lincoln Center. The setting in front of Dante's statue, surrounded by the still pre-spring barren trees, evoked the image of the beginning of Dante's great poem in the *Inferno*... *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, che la dritta via era smarrita.* (Midway upon the journey of our life, I found myself within a forest dark, for the straightforward pathway had been lost.)

Among the distinguished speakers were the Mayor of New York City, Bill de Blasio, who remarked "We are celebrating the fact that Dante Alighieri still lives. Yes, the anniversary is specifically...is the day that he left this earth in physical form, but his influence is alive and well and powerful today. So Dante Alighieri lives, and his effect on us is so profound. Yes, in our family we honor Dante Alighieri, and that's why there is a Dante de Blasio... And we think about the meaning, 700 years, what it has meant for this world and what it means for us as Italian Americans and Italians. Also we celebrate, at this moment, another powerful anniversary, the 160th anniversary of the Unification of Italy. Something we feel, against all the challenges, against foreign oppression and imperialism, Italy came together as one. What Dante also means to us is the beauty of our language, a single unifying language...la lingua più bella del mondo...let me read one line that fits this moment ...e quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle...thence we came forth to see the stars."

Italian Minister of Culture Dario Franceschini sent a congratulatory message, presented at the event. "Your ceremony at the monument dedicated to the Supreme Poet at Dante Park, demonstrates the strong bond of your Italian community to its origins and the ability to remember in your great metropolis the value of Dante's work.. Today, 160 years after the unification of Italy, we celebrate the 700 years since Dante's death in the name of the universality of his work. and the fact that this also happens in New York City, thanks to the work of your Dante Day Committee, can only be a source of pride..."

Deputy Consul General of Italy in New York Silvia Limoncini noted "Celebrating the 700th anniversary of Dante's death in New York highlights, once more, Dante's extraordinary importance in Italian culture, language and art, the pillars of our great soft power. The Consulate General of Italy in New York.... celebrates the genius of Dante and his fundamental contribution to our cultural diplomacy...We sincerely thank the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York who organized this event, which has an extraordinary symbolic meaning, especially during the year dedicated to the Anniversary of the 160 years of diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States, proving that the Italian and Italian-American communities in New York share a vibrant and strong bond with its history, language and culture."

*Italian Parliament Deputy Angela Fucsia Nissoli Fitzgerald and Deputy Francesca La Marca also sent their greetings.*

Comm. Joseph Sciame, IHCC president/chair, noted "Our Dante Day celebration is the first of several events we are planning for the Dante 700 anniversary, culminating during the Italian Heritage and Culture month in October. Our Board of Directors has created themed events since 1976, aiming at celebrating many aspects of Italian heritage and culture. With the father of the Italian language as the protagonist, there is no better celebration than Dante 700!"

Cav. Dr. Anthony Tamburri, dean, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, Queens College/CUNY; president of Dante Alighieri Society Committee in New York remarked "700 years may have passed, yet much of Dante Alighieri's writing remains as pertinent today as they were when he wrote them. His work continues to cross the boundaries of art, culture, and politics."

Uff. Mico Delianova Licastro, proponent of the Dante Day in NYC and chair of the IHCC's planning team commented "I grew up in Italy studying Dante in school and reading his Divine Comedy on a big special edition book with Gustavo Dore's illustration, a birthday gift from my parents. Working with my Board of Directors colleague on this first Dante 700 event is a very special personal privilege."

IHCC Board Member Cav. Dott. Berardo Paradiso, President, Italian American Committee on Education, introduced Prof. Luigi Ballerini, who gave insightful remarks about Dante and his first Italian literary work, *Vita Nuova*.

Students of *La Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi*, in the presence of their professors Eva Giannini and Flora Ghezzo, read Italian and English excerpts from the *Divina Commedia*.

On March 25, 2021, Dante's words resounded throughout New York!