

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very honoured and deeply moved to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award from our Society.

I receive this prestigious distinction with humility because I learned the causes and the value of things;

I receive it with great appreciation because I know the valour of my colleagues and I receive it also with great pleasure because I know the song of my heart.

It represents for me the culmination of a career which evolved while I was a member of this scientific Society.

In this formal and emotional moment I will take the liberty however to mention very briefly three ideas relevant to this award. They pertain to the space, the time and the human condition.

There are very few privileged surgeons who witnessed and participated, from its very beginnings, in this grand and exceptional adventure, this scientific achievement of open heart surgery.

To paraphrase Andrei Andreievich Gromyko: I am proud to say: I was there, I know, I remember.

Not long ago, during an interview, Henry Kissinger was asked: what was the influence of the English Industrial Revolution on the development of the western world? He answered ... Too early to say! And this 'Too early to say' applies to most of our inventions and créations, and even more so to artificial heart valves. As a simple example, when, after a long and difficult struggle, we finally realise our Utopian dream, the successful result is called a great event. This event, in time, becomes a simple fact and sooner or later, with the passage of time, the fact becomes only a distant souvenir in the march of progress. And this happens simply because something better will have been invented.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, the great romantic poet, said it beautifully in one of his poems: "Naught may endure but mutability."

Finally, I would like to take you to ancient Rome. When a general returned victorious from a military campaign, the Roman Senate would offer him a Triumph. Today, they call it a parade. The general, driving a two-wheeled chariot, was leading his legions of centurions, to the applause of the people massed along the Via dei Fori Imperiali. In fact, few people know that the general was not alone in his chariot. A slave was behind him, and the slave was whispering in the general's ear repeatedly:

Do not forget, you are mortal too.

And now, I want to express again my great satisfaction and deep appreciation for having bestowed on me this precious award. I shall slowly retire to the quiet corners of my mind and absorb silently the significance of this major event in my life.