



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL "SISTINE" CHOIR

Sistine Chapel

Tuesday, 20 December 2005

*Dear Maestro, Mons. Liberto,
Dear Choir Boys of the Sistine Chapel,
Dear Singers, Teachers and Collaborators,*

I did not have time to prepare a talk, although my idea was quite simple: to say, in these days before Christmas, that they are days of thanksgiving for gifts; to say, in these days, a "thank you" to you for all that you give us the whole year round, for this great contribution to the glory of God and to the joy of the people on earth.

On the night when the Saviour was born, the Angels proclaimed Christ's birth to the shepherds with these words: "*Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus*". Tradition has always claimed that the Angels did not simply speak like people but sang, and that their song was of such heavenly beauty that it revealed the beauty of Heaven.

Tradition also claims that choirs of treble voices can enable us to hear an echo of the angels' singing.

And it is true that in the singing of the Sistine Chapel Choir at the important liturgies we can sense the presence of the heavenly liturgy, we can feel a little of the beauty through which the Lord wants to communicate his joy to us.

In fact, praise of God demands song. Therefore, throughout the Old Testament - with Moses and with David - until the New Testament - in the Book of Revelation - we hear once again the hymns of the heavenly liturgy that offer a lesson for our liturgy in God's Church.

Consequently, your contribution is essential to the liturgy: it is not a marginal embellishment, for

the liturgy as such demands this beauty, it needs song to praise God and to give joy to those taking part.

I wish to thank you with all my heart for this major contribution. The Pope's liturgy, the liturgy in St Peter's, must be an example of liturgy for the world. You know that today, with television and radio, a vast number of people in every part of the world follow this liturgy. From here, they learn or do not learn what the liturgy is, how the liturgy should be celebrated. Thus, it is very important not only that our masters of ceremony teach the Pope how best to celebrate the liturgy, but also that the Sistine Choir be an example of how to convey beauty in song, in praise of God.

I know - since my brother has as it were enabled me to have a first-hand experience of a choir of treble voices - that this beauty demands a huge commitment and many sacrifices on your part. You have to rise early, boys, in order to get to school; I know Rome's traffic and I can therefore guess how difficult it often is for you to arrive on time. Then, you have to practice to the very end in order to achieve this perfection with the competence that we have just heard once again.

I thank you for all this, also because at these celebrations, while your companions go on long outings, you have to stay in the Basilica to sing and sometimes even have to wait for an hour before being able to sing; and yet you are always ready to make your contribution.

I feel this gratitude every time and on this occasion I wanted to tell you of it. Christmas is the feast of gifts. God himself gave us the greatest gift. He gave us himself. He took flesh, he made himself a child. God gave us the true gift and thus also invites us to give, to give with our hearts; to give a little of ourselves to God and to our neighbour. He also asks us to offer signs of our kindness, of our willingness to offer joy to others.

So I too, therefore, have attempted to make my gratitude visible through presents that will now be given out to you as an expression of my gratitude, which is too strong for words.

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