



The Holy See

OFFICIAL VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO H.E. Mr GIORGIO NAPOLITANO
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

Quirinal Palace
Saturday, 4 October 2008

Mr President,

It is with true pleasure that I once again cross the threshold of this palace where I was welcomed for the first time a few weeks after the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Universal Church. As I enter your official residence, Mr President, the symbolic home of all Italians, I recall with gratitude the courteous visit you wished to pay me in November 2006 at the Vatican, immediately after your election to the Supreme Magistrature of the Italian Republic. The present occasion is an opportunity for me to renew to you my grateful sentiments, also for the not forgotten and especially appreciated gift of the concert, a fine musical performance, which you were pleased to offer me last 24 April. Thus with deep gratitude I offer you, Mr President, your good wife and all who are gathered here my respectful and cordial greeting. My greeting is also addressed in a special way to the distinguished Authorities who govern the Italian State, to the illustrious figures present here, and is extended to the entire People of Italy, who are very dear to me and who are heirs to an age-old civilization and tradition of Christian values.

My Visit, the Visit of the Roman Pontiff to the Quirinal, is not only an act that fits into the context of the many relations between the Holy See and Italy, but, we might say, acquires a far deeper and more symbolic meaning. Indeed, for more than two centuries several of my Predecessors lived here, and from here governed the universal Church, even experiencing trials and persecution, as was the case for the Pontiffs Pius VI and Pius VII, both of whom were torn violently from their episcopal see and taken to exile. The Quirinal, which has witnessed many joyful and some

sorrowful pages of the Papacy's history over the course of the centuries, preserves many signs of the Supreme Pontiffs' patronage of art and culture.

At a certain time in history, this palace became almost a sign of contradiction when, Italy, on the one hand, was longing to be a unified State, and the Holy See, on the other, was concerned to preserve its independence as a guarantee of its universal mission. As the conflict lasted some decades, it was a cause of suffering for those who sincerely loved both their Church and Country. I am referring to the complex "Roman Question", which was definitively and irrevocably settled on the Holy See's part with the signing of the Lateran Pacts on 11 February 1929. The first Visit by a Pontiff to the Quirinal Palace subsequent to 1870 took place towards the end of 1939, 10 years after the Lateran Treaty. On that occasion, my Venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pius XII, the 50th anniversary of whose death we are commemorating this month, thus expressed himself using somewhat poetic images: "The Vatican and the Quirinal, divided by the Tiber, are reunited by the bond of peace as they remember the religion of their forebears and ancestors. The Tiber's waves have swept away and drowned the murky currents of the past in the Tyrrhenian Sea's whirlpools, and along its shores caused olive branches to flower once more (cf. *Discourse*, 28 December 1939).

Today it can truly be said with pleasure that the Italian State and the Apostolic See coexist peacefully and collaborate fruitfully in the city of Rome. My Visit also confirms that the Quirinal and the Vatican are not hills that ignore or resentfully oppose each other. Rather, they are places that symbolize mutual respect for the sovereignty of the State and for the Church, ready to cooperate in order to promote and serve the integral good of the human person and the peaceful development of social coexistence. This I would like to reaffirm is a positive reality that can be verified almost daily at various levels, and to which other States too can look, in order to learn a useful lesson.

Mr President, my Visit today is taking place on the day on which Italy is celebrating with great solemnity her special Patron, St Francis of Assisi. Among others, it was to St Francis that Pius XI made reference in his announcement of the signing of the Lateran Pacts and especially the Constitution of Vatican City State; for that Pontiff, the new sovereign reality was, as it was for the *Poverello*, "enough body, to keep body and soul together" (*Discourse*, 11 February 1929). Together with St Catherine of Siena, St Francis was proposed by the Italian Bishops and confirmed by the Servant of God Pius XII as the heavenly Patron of Italy (cf. Apostolic Letter *Licet Commissa*, 18 June 1939; AAS xxxi [1939], 256-257). At a time when the threat of war was looming over Europe, Pope Pacelli wanted to entrust Italy's destiny to the protection of this great Saint and illustrious Italian, dramatically involving your "beautiful Country" as well.

The choice of St Francis as Patron of Italy was thus motivated by the profound correspondence between the personality and action of the *Poverello* of Assisi and that of the noble Italian nation. As the Servant of God John Paul II recalled during his Visit to the Quirinal on this very same day in

1985, "it would be difficult to find another figure who so richly and harmoniously embodies the characteristics of the Italian genius. "At a time when the establishment of independent City States was arousing ferments of social, economic and political renewal which shook the old feudal world to its very foundations", Pope Wojty³a continued, "Francis was able to rise above the warring factions, preaching the Gospel of peace and love in full fidelity to the Church of which he felt himself to be a son, and in total adherence to the people of whom he knew himself to be a part" (*Address to President Francesco Cossiga*, 4 October 1985; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 14 October 1985, p. 1).

In this Saint, whose figure attracts believers and non-believers, we can glimpse the image of what the eternal mission of the Church is, also in her relations with civil society. In our epoch of profound and often anguishing change, the Church continues to propose the Gospel message of salvation to all and strives to contribute to the edification of a society founded on truth and freedom, on respect for human life and dignity, on justice and on social solidarity. Therefore, as I have recalled on other occasions: "In pursuing this aim, the Church is neither proposing goals of power for herself nor claiming privileges or aspiring to advantageous social or financial positions. Her sole purpose is to serve men and women, drawing inspiration as the supreme norm for her conduct from the words and example of Jesus Christ, who "went about doing good and healing all" (Acts 10: 38)" ([*Address to H.E. Mr Antonio Zanardi Landi, Ambassador of Italy*](#), 4 October 2007).

To bring her mission to completion, the Church must everywhere and always be able to enjoy the right to religious freedom, considered in its full breadth. At the United Nations Assembly, in which the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is being commemorated this year, I wished to reaffirm that, "the full guarantee of religious liberty cannot be limited to the free exercise of worship, but has to give due consideration to the public dimension of religion, and hence, to the possibility of believers playing their part in building the social order" ([*Address to the United Nations General Assembly*](#), New York, 18 April 2008). The Church makes this contribution to building society in many ways, being a body of many members, a reality at the same time both spiritual and visible, in which the members have different vocations, tasks and roles. She feels particularly responsible for the new generations: indeed, the pressing problem of education, the indispensable key for access to a future inspired by the perennial values of Christian humanism, is being felt today. The formation of youth is therefore an undertaking in which the Church also feels involved, together with families and schools. Indeed, she is well aware of the importance education has in learning authentic freedom, a necessary presupposition for a positive service to the common good. Only a serious educative commitment will make it possible to build a supportive society truly motivated by a sense of legality.

Mr President, I am pleased here to renew the hope that the Christian communities and many Italian ecclesial bodies may fittingly form people, especially youth, besides training responsible citizens committed to civil life. I am sure that the Pastors and faithful will continue to make their important contribution in order to build, also at these moments of financial and social uncertainty,

the common good of the country, as well as of Europe and of the entire human family, paying special attention to the poor and the marginalized, young people in search of employment and those who are unemployed, families, and the elderly who have built our present with effort and hard work, and hence deserve the gratitude of all. I likewise hope that the contribution of the Catholic community may be welcomed by all in the same spirit of openness as that in which it is offered. There is no reason to fear prevarication to the detriment of freedom on the part of the Church and her members, who moreover expect their right to be recognized not to betray their conscience, illumined by the Gospel. This will be even easier if it is never forgotten that all the members of society must work, with reciprocal respect, to achieve in the community that true good of the human being of which the heart and mind of the Italian people, nourished for 20 centuries by a culture steeped in Christianity, are well aware.

Mr President, in this most significant place, I would like to renew the expression of my affection, indeed of my special love for this beloved nation. I assure you and all Italians of my prayers, as I invoke the motherly protection of Mary, venerated with such deep devotion in every corner of the peninsula and the islands, from north to south, as I have also been able to see on my [Pastoral Visits](#). In taking my leave, I make my own the exhortation that Bl. John XXIII addressed to Italy as a pilgrim to Assisi on the eve of the Second Vatican Council: "Beloved Italy, you on whose shores the barque of Peter came to rest and it is for this reason principally that from all lands the people of the whole universe come to you, who can welcome them with supreme respect and love may you preserve the sacred testament that commits you before heaven and earth" (*Discourse*, 4 October 1962).

May God protect and bless Italy and all its inhabitants!

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 42 pp. 29, 30.*

© Copyright 2008 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana