



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE ITALIAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE

**MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Hall of Flags, Palazzo Borromeo
Saturday, 13 December 2008

*Mr Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Mr Undersecretary of the Prime Minister's Office,
Mr Ambassador to the Holy See,
Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps to the Holy See,
Distinguished Authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am truly delighted today to have been able to accept the kind invitation extended to me to visit this historic building, the headquarters of the Embassy of Italy to the Holy See. I cordially greet everyone, starting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs whom I thank for the respectful words he has just addressed to me. I greet the other Ministers, the Authorities present and especially Ambassador Antonio Zanardi Landi. I warmly thank you for your courteous welcome, accompanied by a pleasant musical interlude.

As has been mentioned, this historic palace has received Visits from three of my Predecessors: the Servants of God Pius XII on 2 June 1951, Paul VI on 2 October 1964, and John Paul II on 2 March 1986. On today's solemn and at the same time informal occasion, my recent meetings with the President of the Republic spring to mind: last 24 April, on the occasion of the concert he offered to me for the anniversary of the solemn beginning of my service on the Chair of Peter; then at the Quirinal Palace on 4 October and, last Wednesday, in the Paul VI Audience Hall in the

Vatican on the occasion of the concert for the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, which, Mr Minister of Foreign Affairs, you mentioned. As I address a respectful and grateful greeting to the President of the Republic, I would like to repeat precisely what I said during my Visit to the Quirinal: "that the Italian State and the Apostolic See coexist peacefully and collaborate fruitfully in the city of Rome" (*Address on Official Visit to H.E. Mr Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic*, Quirinal Palace, 4 October 2008).

The special attention the Pontiffs have shown for this diplomatic seat would suffice to demonstrate the recognition of the important role that the Embassy of Italy has played and still plays in the relations between the Holy See and the Italian Republic, as well as in the relations of mutual collaboration between the Church and the State in Italy. We shall certainly have an opportunity to demonstrate this important dual order of diplomatic, social and religious ties in the coming month of February on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the signing of the Lateran Pacts and the 25th anniversary of the Agreement on the Modification of the Concordat. A reference to this anniversary has already been made, to highlight rightly the fruitful relationship that exists between Italy and the Holy See. It entails a particularly important and significant agreement in the current world situation, in which the persistent conflicts and tensions among peoples are rendering collaboration among all who share the same ideals of justice, solidarity and peace ever more necessary. Furthermore, taking up what you yourself said, Mr Minister of Foreign Affairs, I cannot fail to mention with deep gratitude the daily collaboration between the Embassy of Italy and my Secretariat of State, and in this regard I cordially greet those Mission Heads at Palazzo Borromeo both current and recently succeeded who have kindly graced us with their presence.

This brief Visit is a favourable opportunity for me to reassert that the Church is well aware that "fundamental to Christianity is the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (cf. Mt 22: 21), in other words, the distinction between Church and State" (*Deus caritas est*, n. 28). Not only does the Church recognize and respect this distinction and this autonomy but she rejoices in it as being a great progress of humanity and a fundamental condition for her own freedom and the fulfilment of her universal mission of salvation among all peoples. At the same time the Church feels it is her task, following the dictates of her own social doctrine, to declare "on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being" (*ibid.*), to reawaken moral and spiritual forces in society, helping to open "mind and will" to the authentic demands of the common good. Thus, recalling the value not only for private but also and especially for public life of certain fundamental ethical principles, the Church contributes de facto to guaranteeing and promoting the dignity of the person and the common good of society. It is in this sense that true and proper cooperation desired between State and Church is brought about.

Now allow me also to mention gratefully the precious contribution that both this Diplomatic Representation and the Italian Authorities in general generously offer to enable the Holy See to freely carry out its universal mission and therefore, also to engage in diplomatic relations with a great many of the world's countries. In this regard, I greet and thank the Dean and those

representatives of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who are taking part in our encounter. I am sure that they share in this appreciation for the valuable services that Italy contributes to their delicate and specialized mission.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is truly significant that since 1929 the headquarters of the diplomatic representation of Italy to the Holy See have been based in the building in which St Charles Borromeo lived as a young man. He was then carrying out the office of collaborator of the Roman Pontiff in the Roman Curia, and directing what is normally defined as the diplomacy of the Holy See. Those who work here can thus discover in this Saint a constant protector and, at the same time, a model from whom to draw inspiration while engaging in their daily duties. I entrust to his intercession all who are gathered here today and I express to each one my sincere good wishes for every good. While the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus is approaching I extend these good wishes to the Italian Authorities, starting with the President of the Republic, and to the entire beloved people of this well loved Peninsula. My wishes for peace then embrace all the countries of the earth, whether officially represented at the Holy See or not. They are wishes for light and for authentic human progress, for prosperity and for harmony, all realities to which we may aspire with trusting hope, because they are gifts that Jesus brought into the world when he was born in Bethlehem. May the Virgin Mary, whom we venerated a few days ago as the Immaculate Conception, obtain these gifts for us and every other true good desired for Italy and for the whole world, from her Son, the Prince of Peace, whose Blessing I warmly invoke upon all of you and upon your loved ones.

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