



The Holy See

***GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO FORMER SWISS GUARDS AND PARTICIPANTS ON OCCASION OF THE FIFTH-
CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF THEIR CORPS***

*Saint Peter's Square
Thursday, 4 May 2006*

I am pleased to offer my cordial greetings to you all, dear friends, former Swiss Guards and participants in the special "march" organized on the occasion of the 500th Anniversary of the descent on Rome of the first 150 "Gwardiknechte".

Following the same route taken 500 years ago, passing through Milan, Fidenza, Lucca, Siena and Acquapendente, you have reached Rome and here you are now in St Peter's Square, so well-known to you. Here to welcome you and offer you his greeting is the Successor of Pope Julius II, whose name is inseparably linked to the praiseworthy Pontifical Swiss Guard Corps.

Dear former Swiss Guards, with this important event that started in Bellinzona on 7 April and ends here in Rome today, you have wished to honour your predecessors, and at the same time you have been able to thank the Lord for having been personally a member of the Swiss Guard Corps, thus strengthening your bond with this "family" also at the end of your service.

You wanted to undertake this long journey as a "pilgrimage", following the famous "Via Francigena", a way travelled by pilgrims in the Middle Ages, on the route from France to Rome.

During the days of your journey, on which you have covered approximately 720 km., you were able to cross through many villages and towns and tell the people your story, and thus make them acquainted with the spirit that enlivens the Swiss Guard Corps.

In a certain way you have been able to share the sentiments of the first 150 Swiss Guards who, on 21 January 1506, upon reaching the Eternal City, dressed immediately in the yellow- and red-stripped uniform, the colours of the Della Rovere family.

The following day, they left off from the *Porta del Popolo* and crossed the *Campo de' Fiori*, arriving at the Vatican Hill. It was 22 January 1506, the day on which the Pontifical Swiss Guard was created.

Dear friends, I rejoice with you in this beautiful initiative that commemorates the courage of the 150 Swiss citizens who with great generosity defended the Sovereign Pontiff unto death, writing with their sacrifice an important page in the history of the Church.

Looking back at these last five centuries, let us give thanks to God for the good done by your predecessors and for the valuable contribution that the Pontifical Swiss Guard still continues to offer to the Holy See today.

As we entrust those who died to Divine Mercy, let us invoke upon the members who make up your large and worthy Former Swiss Guards' Association the constant protection of the Lord.

May he continue to guide your steps and support with his grace all your actions, and may he enliven with his spirit the many initiatives that you took to perpetuate and accomplish your own special experience in the Eternal City, at the service of the Apostolic See!

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