



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BAVARIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MOUNTAIN DEFENCE DURING THEIR PILGRIMAGE
TO ROME**

Saturday 13 May 2006

*Your Eminence,
Dear Mr Ambassador,
Dear Gebirgsschützen,*

It gives me joy to greet you during your pilgrimage in honour of the *Patrona Bavariae* here at the Vatican. Thank you, dear Cardinal Wetter, for your cordial words on behalf of all; since you are Archbishop of Munich and Freising, you have a special link with me as my immediate successor.

Ninety years ago, my Predecessor Pope Benedict XV, at the request of Ludwig III, the last King of Bavaria, confirmed by establishing the ecclesial feast of the *Patrona Bavariae* the decision of Duke Maximilian of Bavaria, who 300 years earlier, in 1616, had placed his duchy under the protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

The liturgical feast was celebrated for the first time on 14 May 1916 in Munich.

It was an important sign of encouragement and hope for a Country that feared for its precious cultural and religious heritage in the tumult of the First World War. At the same time this feast, as it were, crowned 12 centuries of Marian veneration in Bavaria. Indeed, when St Corbinian arrived in the year 724, there already was a church dedicated to Mary which was to become the present-day Cathedral of Freising.

With the annual celebration of the day in honour of the *Patrona Bavariae*, the first Sunday in May, in the midst of the "*Bund der Bayerischen Gebirgsschützen-Kompanien*", you put yourselves under the protection of the great Patroness of our common Homeland, but also at her service. You are no longer duty bound to defend the Country from foreign enemies with weapons in your hands

as in past centuries, but perhaps today the dangers are even more serious, for they are not often recognized as such.

The two World Wars have left many people in a certain way "rootless". They are people who have never known the meaning of a "homeland", nor that belonging to one can give human beings a sense of inner security, for it is something more than a mere geographical fact.

For us it means having roots in the Christian faith that has shaped Bavaria and the whole of Europe from within and at the same time gives our life its authentic meaning. This faith is expressed in our Land, as in other regions, in special forms: from the Baroque style of our churches to the humble rural wayside crucifixes, from the festive Corpus Christi processions to the small pilgrimages to the many shrines, from the great works of sacred music to the popular hymns of the Alpine areas.

You have done your duty in preserving and defending the popular Bavarian culture. With this objective, you have placed yourselves at the service of the *Patrona Bavariae*. The cultural legacy you desire to protect and care for is not only an end in itself but aims to contribute to restoring people's roots wherever it has disappeared, and lead people back through signs to its content, to what can give their lives support and direction.

In the many ways in which it is expressed, the popular Bavarian culture displays the deep and indestructible joy that Jesus Christ wanted to give us when he said: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10: 10).

I would like to encourage you to stay firmly faithful to the Christian values which constitute Bavaria's own special roots. May Mary, the Most Holy Virgin and Mother of God, *Patrona Bavariae*, keep her protective hand upon you all. Through her intercession, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.