



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE NATIONAL CONGRESS
OF "SCHOLAE CANTORUM"
ORGANIZED BY THE ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SAINT CECILIA**

*Paul VI Hall
Saturday, 10 November 2012*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you with great joy on the occasion of your pilgrimage, organized by the Associazione Santa Cecilia, which I praise first of all with a warm greeting to the President, whom I thank for his courteous words, and to all the collaborators. I greet you with affection, members of the numerous *Scholae Cantorum* in every part of Italy! I am very glad to meet you, and to know — as was announced — that tomorrow you will be taking part in the Eucharistic Celebration in St Peter's Basilica, at which the Cardinal Archpriest Angelo Comastri will preside, offering, of course, the service of praise in song.

Your Congress fits intentionally into the 50th anniversary of the opening of the [Second Vatican Council](#). And I saw with pleasure that the Associazione Santa Cecilia has intended in this way to draw your attention once again to the teaching of the Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, in particular where — in chapter six — it addresses sacred music. On this anniversary, as you well know, I wanted a special [Year of Faith](#) for the entire Church so as to encourage a deepening in the faith of all the baptized and a common commitment to the New Evangelization. In meeting you I would thus like to emphasize briefly how sacred music can first and foremost foster faith and, in addition, can cooperate in the new evangelization.

Concerning faith, the personal life of St Augustine — one of the great Fathers of the Church who lived between the fourth and fifth centuries after Christ — springs to mind. It is certain that listening to the singing of the Psalms and hymns during the liturgies at which St Ambrose presided made

an important contribution to his conversion. Indeed, if faith is always born from listening to the word of God — a form of listening, naturally, not only of the senses but that also passes from the senses to the mind and heart — there is no doubt that music, and especially song, can give the recitation of the Psalms and Canticles of the Bible greater communicative force. Among his charisms St Ambrose had in particular an outstanding musical sensitivity and talent. Once he had been ordained Bishop of Milan, he put his gift at the service of faith and evangelization.

In this regard the witness of Augustine, who was then a teacher in Milan and was in search of God, in search of faith, is highly significant. In Book Ten of his *Confessions*, his autobiography, he writes: “when I call to mind the tears I shed at the songs of your Church at the outset of my recovered faith, and how even now I am moved, not by the singing but by what is sung (when they are sung with a clear and skillfully modulated voice), I then come to acknowledge the great utility of this custom” once again (33, 50).

Augustine’s experience of the Ambrosian hymns was so strong that they were impressed in his mind and he often cited them in his works; indeed, he wrote a commentary of his own on music, *De Musica*. He says that he does not approve of the search for mere tangible pleasure during the sung liturgies, but recognizes that good music and good singing can help one receive the word of God and feel a salutary emotion. May this testimony of St Augustine help us to understand that the Sacred Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in line with the Tradition of the Church, teaches that “as a combination of sacred music and words, it [the musical tradition of the universal Church] forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy” (n. 112). Why “necessary and integral”? Certainly not for purely aesthetic reasons, in a superficial sense, but because, due to its beauty, it cooperates in nourishing and expressing faith and hence is to the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful, which is the purpose of sacred music (cf *ibid.*).

For this very reason I would like to thank you for your precious service: the music you perform is neither an accessory nor merely an external embellishment of the liturgy; it is the liturgy itself. You help the entire Assembly to praise God, to draw his Word into the depths of hearts; by singing you pray and enable others to pray, and take part in the singing and prayers of the liturgy that in glorifying the Creator embrace the entire creation.

The second aspect I would suggest to you for your reflection is the relationship between sacred song and the new evangelization. The conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy recalls the importance of sacred music in the mission *ad gentes* and urges the faithful to esteem the traditional music of peoples (cf. n. 119). However, even in countries of ancient evangelization, such as Italy, sacred music — with its own great tradition, which is our Western culture — can have and indeed has an important task: to encourage the rediscovery of God, as well as a renewed approach to the Christian message and to the mysteries of the faith.

Let us think of the famous experience of Paul Claudel, a French poet, who was converted while

listening to the singing of the *Magnificat* at Vespers of Christmas in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris. “At that moment”, he wrote, “I understood the event that dominates my entire life. In an instant my heart was moved and I believed. I believed with such a strong force of adherence, with such an uplifting of my whole being, with such powerful conviction, in a certainty that left no room for any kind of doubt, that since then no reasoning, no circumstance of my turbulent life has been able to shake or touch my faith”. Yet, without turning to distinguished figures, let us think of all the people who have been moved in the depths of their heart while listening to sacred music; and even more, of those who have felt once again drawn to God by the beauty of liturgical music — as was Claudel. And here, dear friends, you have an important role: strive to improve the quality of liturgical song without fearing to recover and to enhance the great musical tradition of the Church, which in Gregorian chant and polyphony has two of its loftiest expressions, as the Second Vatican Council itself says (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 116).

And I would like to emphasize that the active participation of the whole People of God in the liturgy does not consist solely in speaking, but also in listening to and welcoming the Word with one’s senses and mind, and this is also true for sacred music. In liturgical celebrations you, who have the gift of singing, can make so many hearts sing.

Dear friends, I hope that in Italy liturgical music may reach greater heights, to praise the Lord as he deserves and to show that the Church is the place in which beauty is at home. My thanks again to everyone for this meeting! Thank you.