MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
FOR THE OPENING OF THE
EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2012

His Excellency
Archbishop Józef Michalik
President of the Polish Episcopal Conference,
Warsaw

Soon the European Football Championship, to be held in Poland and Ukraine, will begin. This sporting event not only involves the organizers, athletes and fans — in different ways and in different walks of life — but the whole of society. The Church herself does not remain indifferent to this event, especially not to the spiritual needs of those who take part in it. With gratitude I welcome the news of the catechetical, liturgical and prayer meetings planned.

My beloved Predecessor Bl. John Paul II said “the potential of sports makes it a significant vehicle for the overall development of the person and a very useful element in building a more human society. A sense of brotherhood, generosity, honesty and respect for one’s body — virtues that are undoubtedly essential for every good athlete — help to build a civil society where antagonism is replaced by healthy competition, where meeting is preferred to conflict, an honest challenge to spiteful opposition. When understood in this way, sport is not an end, but a means; it can become a vehicle of civility and genuine recreation, encouraging people to put the best of themselves on the field and to avoid what might be dangerous or seriously harmful to themselves or to others” (Address to participants of the International Convention on Sport, 28 October 2000).

Moreover team sport, such as football, is an important school for teaching a sense of respect for others including opponents, the spirit of personal sacrifice with a view to the good of the whole group, the enhancement of gifts of each person, who is a member of the team; in a word, how to overcome the logic of individualism and selfishness which often characterizes human relationships, in order to make room for the logic of brotherhood and love, which alone can enable the promotion — at all levels — of the true common good.
With these brief thoughts I encourage all those who are involved in this event to work with care, so that this experience may be lived as expression of the noblest virtues and human actions in the spirit of peace and genuine joy. I entrust to God in prayer the pastors, volunteers, players, fans and all those engaged in the preparation and conduct of this Championship. To all I impart my Blessing.

From the Vatican, 6 June 2012

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ITALIAN SKI INSTRUCTORS

Monday, 15 November 2010

Mr Minister,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to offer you all my cordial greeting. I address a grateful thought to Hon. Mr Franco Frattini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Italian State, who has wished to take part in this Audience since he himself belongs to the large group of ski instructors. I thank him for his courteous words on behalf of all. On this occasion, I also express my deep gratitude for his efforts to have Italy welcome straight away numerous Catholics who were recently injured in Baghdad. Thank you.

Your presence prompts me to make two brief reflections on the value of sports and the natural environment. Sports are one of the means that contribute to the person’s harmonious development and to his moral perfection (cf. Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum Educationis). Your duty as “ski instructors” helps to stimulate various capacities, for example, for persistence in pursuing goals, for respecting rules and for tenacity in confronting and surmounting difficulties. Practised ethically and with passion, sports become a training ground for learning and developing human and Christian values, as well as for practising a healthy spirit of competition. In fact, they teach the harmonization of important dimensions of the human being, favouring their integral development. Through sports, a person understands better that his body cannot be considered an object; rather, through corporeity, he expresses himself and enters into relationships with others. In this way, the balance between the physical and spiritual dimensions does not bring us to idolize the body, but rather to respect it and not to let it become an instrument to be strengthened at all costs, possibly even by resorting to illegal methods.

The other aspect I would like to mention is suggested by the fact that skiing is done in a mountain environment. This makes us feel small in a special way and restores for us the right dimensions of our being creatures. It enables us to ask ourselves about the meaning of creation and to look up on high and open ourselves to the Creator.

I think of how often, in climbing a mountain in order to ski down it or in cross-country skiing, breathtaking views unfolded; they uplift the mind and spontaneously invite us not only to raise our outer gaze but also the gaze of the heart.
In contemplating creation, man recognizes the greatness of God, the ultimate source of his being and of the universe. We should not forget that the relationship with creation is an important element for the development of the human identity and not even the sin of man has eliminated his duty to be a guardian of the world.

Sports can also be conceived and lived as a part of this responsibility. Progress in the fields of science and technology give human beings the possibility to meddle with and manipulate nature, but the risk that always lies in wait is the desire to replace the Creator and reduce creation to a product to be used and consumed.

What, instead, is the right approach? Surely it consists in a profound sense of gratitude and recognition, but also of responsibility for tilling and keeping the work of God (cf. Gen 2:15). Sports are a help in pursuing certain goals since they affect one's lifestyle itself which they orient to balance, self-discipline and respect. For you, then, in particular, contact with nature is a reason for cultivating a profound love for God’s creation.

In the light of these reflections, your role appears important for a healthy training in sports and an education in respect for the environment. This is not, therefore, a duty to carry out on one’s own, but rather in agreement with families — especially when your students are minors — and in collaboration with school and other educational institutions. Your example as lay faithful is also important in the context of sports, which can give the right centrality to moments fundamental to the life of faith and, especially, to the sanctification of Sunday as the Lord’s Day.

Dear friends, I thank you for your cordial visit and as I wish you all the best in your professional and sports activities, I assure you of my prayers and I cordially bless you, your relatives and your students.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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Here is the address Benedict XVI delivered the second day of his four-day state visit to the United Kingdom, during a meeting with some 4,000 students of Catholic schools at the Sports Arena of St Mary’s University College in Twickenham. All the Catholic schools of England, Wales and Scotland followed the event via Internet.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Dear young friends,

First of all, I want to say how glad I am to be here with you today. I greet you most warmly, those who have come to Saint Mary's University from Catholic schools and colleges across the United Kingdom, and all who are watching on television and via the internet. I thank Bishop McMahon for his gracious welcome, I thank the choir and the band for the lovely music which began our celebration, and I thank Miss Bellot for her kind words on behalf of all the young people present. In view of London’s forthcoming Olympic Games, it has been a pleasure to inaugurate this Sports Foundation, named in honour of Pope John Paul II, and I pray that all who come here will give glory to God through their sporting activities, as well as bringing enjoyment to themselves and to others.

It is not often that a Pope, or indeed anyone else, has the opportunity to speak to the students of all the Catholic schools of England, Wales and Scotland at the same time. And since I have the chance now, there is something I very much want to say to you. I hope that among those of you listening to me today there are some of the future saints of the twenty-first century. What God wants most of all for each one of you is that you should become holy. He loves you much more than you could ever begin to imagine, and he wants the very best for you. And by far the best thing for you is to grow in holiness.

Perhaps some of you have never thought about this before. Perhaps some of you think being a saint is not for you. Let me explain what I mean. When we are young, we can usually think of people that we look up to, people we admire, people we want to be like. It could be someone we meet in our daily lives that we hold in great esteem. Or it could be someone famous. We live in a celebrity culture, and young people are often
encouraged to model themselves on figures from the world of sport or entertainment. My question for you is this: what are the qualities you see in others that you would most like to have yourselves? What kind of person would you really like to be?

When I invite you to become saints, I am asking you not to be content with second best. I am asking you not to pursue one limited goal and ignore all the others. Having money makes it possible to be generous and to do good in the world, but on its own, it is not enough to make us happy. Being highly skilled in some activity or profession is good, but it will not satisfy us unless we aim for something greater still. It might make us famous, but it will not make us happy. Happiness is something we all want, but one of the great tragedies in this world is that so many people never find it, because they look for it in the wrong places. The key to it is very simple – true happiness is to be found in God. We need to have the courage to place our deepest hopes in God alone, not in money, in a career, in worldly success, or in our relationships with others, but in God. Only he can satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts.

Not only does God love us with a depth and an intensity that we can scarcely begin to comprehend, but he invites us to respond to that love. You all know what it is like when you meet someone interesting and attractive, and you want to be that person’s friend. You always hope they will find you interesting and attractive, and want to be your friend. God wants your friendship. And once you enter into friendship with God, everything in your life begins to change. As you come to know him better, you find you want to reflect something of his infinite goodness in your own life. You are attracted to the practice of virtue. You begin to see greed and selfishness and all the other sins for what they really are, destructive and dangerous tendencies that cause deep suffering and do great damage, and you want to avoid falling into that trap yourselves. You begin to feel compassion for people in difficulties and you are eager to do something to help them. You want to come to the aid of the poor and the hungry, you want to comfort the sorrowful, you want to be kind and generous. And once these things begin to matter to you, you are well on the way to becoming saints.

In your Catholic schools, there is always a bigger picture over and above the individual subjects you study, the different skills you learn. All the work you do is placed in the context of growing in friendship with God, and all that flows from that friendship. So you learn not just to be good students, but good citizens, good people. As you move higher up the school, you have to make choices regarding the subjects you study, you begin to specialize with a view to what you are going to do later on in life. That is right and proper. But always remember that every subject you study is part of a bigger picture. Never allow yourselves to become narrow. The world needs good scientists, but a scientific outlook becomes dangerously narrow if it ignores the religious
or ethical dimension of life, just as religion becomes narrow if it rejects the legitimate contribution of science to our understanding of the world. We need good historians and philosophers and economists, but if the account they give of human life within their particular field is too narrowly focused, they can lead us seriously astray.

A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints. I know that there are many non-Catholics studying in the Catholic schools in Great Britain, and I wish to include all of you in my words today. I pray that you too will feel encouraged to practise virtue and to grow in knowledge and friendship with God alongside your Catholic classmates. You are a reminder to them of the bigger picture that exists outside the school, and indeed, it is only right that respect and friendship for members of other religious traditions should be among the virtues learned in a Catholic school. I hope too that you will want to share with everyone you meet the values and insights you have learned through the Christian education you have received.

Dear friends, I thank you for your attention, I promise to pray for you, and I ask you to pray for me. I hope to see many of you next August, at the World Youth Day in Madrid. In the meantime, may God bless you all!
ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS
HELD IN ROME ORGANIZED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL SWIMMING FEDERATION (FINA)

Courtyard of the Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 1st August 2009

Dear Friends,

I accepted with deep pleasure the invitation to meet you on the occasion of the World Swimming Championships. Thank you for your appreciated visit; I gladly offer my cordial welcome to each and every one of you! I address a respectful thought first of all to Mr Julio Maglione, President of the International Swimming Federation (FINA), and to the Hon. Mr Paolo Barelli, President of the Italian Swimming Federation (FIN), while I also thank them for their kind words on behalf of all.

I greet the Authorities present, the directors and those in charge, the technicians, delegates, journalists and mass media operators, the volunteers, the organizers and all who have contributed to putting on this world sports event. I extend my most affectionate greeting specially to you, dear athletes of various nationalities who are competing in these World Swimming Championships. With your competitions you offer the world a fascinating spectacle of discipline and humanity, of artistic beauty and tenacious determination. You show what goals the vitality of youth can achieve when young people submit to the effort of a demanding training and are willing to accept numerous sacrifices and deprivations. All this is also an important lesson for life for your peers.

As has just been recalled, sports, practised with enthusiasm and an acute ethical sense, especially for youth become a training ground of healthy competition and physical improvement, a school of formation in the human and spiritual values, a privileged means for personal growth and contact with society. Watching these swimming championships and admiring the results achieved make it easy to understand the great potential with which God has endowed the human body and the interesting objectives of perfection it is able to achieve. One then thinks of the Psalmist's wonder who in contemplating the universe, praises the glory of God and the greatness of man: "when I behold your heavens", we read in Psalm 8, "the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place what is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?" (vv. 3-4). Then, how can one fail to thank the Lord for having endowed the human body with such perfection; for having enriched it with a beauty and harmony that can be expressed in so many ways?

The sports disciplines, each in a different way, help us to appreciate this gift which God has made to us. The Church follows and encourages sport, practised not as an end in
itself, but as a means, as a precious instrument for the perfection and balance of the whole person. In the Bible we also find interesting references to sport as an image of life. For example, the Apostle Paul, considered sports an authentic human value and used them not only as a metaphor to illustrate lofty ethical and ascent ideals but also as a means for human formation and as an element of human culture and civilization.

Dear athletes, you are models for your peers, and your example can be crucial to them in building their future positively. So be champions in sports and in life! John Paul II who was mentioned earlier, met representatives of the world of sports in October of the Jubilee Year 2000. He stressed the great importance of practising sport, precisely since "it can encourage young people to develop important values such as loyalty, perseverance, friendship, sharing and solidarity". Furthermore, sports events like yours, thanks to the modern means of social communication, have a considerable impact on public opinion, given that the language of sports is universal and reaches out in particular to the young generations. Therefore, the use of sport as a vehicle for positive messages contributes to building a more fraternal world with greater solidarity.

Dear French-speaking athlete friends, I am happy to receive you and to offer you a cordial greeting on the occasion of the World Swimming Championships. The sport you practise is a school of generosity, loyalty and respect for others. May it encourage the development of the values of friendship and sharing between people and among peoples. May God bless you!

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking athletes taking part in the International Swimming Federation World Championships, together with the many officials, support staff, volunteers and friends who have joined you here in Rome during these days. May your pursuit of excellence be accompanied by gratitude for your God-given gifts and a desire to help others to use their own gifts in building a better and more united world. Upon you and your families I invoke God's Blessings of joy and peace.

I warmly greet the German-speaking participants in the World Swimming Championships here in Rome. Dear friends, as sports competitors you offer performances of a very high-standard and are an example for many young people. Be committed to all that is good and lasting in the world in which you live, so that sport may serve to develop the gifts that God has made to humankind. May the Lord bless you as you journey onwards.

I cordially greet all the Spanish-speaking people present here: athletes, directors and all who have taken part in various ways in the World Swimming Championships. I ask you to continue to practice your sport in harmony with the highest human values, so that it may encourage the healthy physical development of those who practise it and thereby set an example to children and young people for their integral formation. Thank you.

Dear Portuguese-speaking friends who are taking part in these World Swimming Championships. I warmly greet you all and take this opportunity to thank you for the lesson of life that you offer to the world, consisting of discipline and humanity, of
artistic beauty and of a strong determination to win and, especially, to get the better of yourselves. I invoke God's help upon you and upon your families, as I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

Dear friends, and especially you, dear athletes, as I thank you once again for this cordial meeting, I express the hope that you will "swim" towards ever more incomparable ideals.

I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I invoke God's Blessing upon you, upon your families and upon all your loved ones.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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Address to the Austrian National Alpine Ski team

Address of His Holiness, Benedict XVI, to the members of the Austrian National Alpine Ski Team who he received in the Apostolic Palace
Vatican City, October 6, 2007

Dear men and women athletes!

I am pleased to greet all of you here in the Vatican just a few weeks after my trip to your beautiful country; this occasion brings to mind such fond memories of my visit. I cordially welcome you to the Apostolic Palace, the home to the successor of Peter. I thank you Mr. President, Prof. Schröcksnadel, and Mrs. Hosp, for the kind words you addressed to me on behalf of all here present.

As members of the Austrian national alpine ski team, it is possible to say that you are ambassadors throughout the world where skiing and winter sports are held in great importance. At the same time, you are also, in a certain sense, important role models of integration within your own country where there is such great appreciation of winter sports. Many look up to you, not only for your noteworthy sporting achievements, but also for the virtues and values that are characteristic of your sport: perseverance, determination, spirit of sacrifice, internal and external discipline, attention to others, team work, solidarity, justice, courtesy, and the recognition of one’s own limits, and still others. These same virtues also come into play in a significant way in daily life and need to be continually exercised and practiced. In fact, you, dear athletes, shoulder the responsibility –not

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less significant – of bearing witness to these attitudes and convictions and of incarnating them beyond your sporting activity into the fabric of the family, culture, and religion. In doing so, you will be of great help for others, especially the youth, who are immersed in rapidly developing society where there is a widespread loss of values and growing disorientation.

This holds true not only for sport, but for all people. Body, spirit and soul form a single unity and each component must be in harmony with the other. You know how necessary this interior harmony is in order to reach sporting goals at the highest levels. Consequently, even the most demanding sports must be rooted in a holistic view of the human person, recognizing his profound dignity and favouring an overall development and full maturity of the person. Otherwise, if sport is only focused on mere material performance, it will fall short of realizing its necessary social dimension. In the end, sporting activity must help one to recognize their own talents and capacities, their very efforts and their own very life as gifts that come from God. For this reason, sport should always have God our Creator as its ultimate point of reference. It is in this sense that the Apostle makes reference to sports competition in order to recall man’s highest calling: “Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one” (1Cor. 9: 24-25).

Dear friends, you are not only sports competitors, but also athletes who are striving to attain the crown of the Christian life. May your example spur on others to “compete” in their own sphere in order to attain that which is lasting and good, and to be athletes of Christ who wants to give to all people the true life. Be assured that I will accompany you abundantly with my prayers while I cordially impart on you and your members and friends my Apostolic Blessing.
LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF TURIN, CARDINAL SEVERINO POLETTI,
FOR THE OPENING OF THE 20th EDITION OF THE WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES IN TURIN, ITALY

To My Venerable Brother
Cardinal Severino Poletto
Archbishop of Turin

With great pastoral attention, you have asked certain priests to begin some appropriate spiritual initiatives on the occasion of the 20th edition of the Winter Olympic Games, which will be held in February 2006 in Turin and other areas of the region, involving the people of the Dioceses of Turin, Susa and Pinerolo.

Numerous athletes, sports managers and trainers as well as many journalists and broadcasters from around the world will gather for this important event.

Moreover, for the upcoming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, you, Venerable Brother, will preside at a special Eucharistic Celebration in the Sports Palace of Turin, during which the flame will be presented that will remain alight for the entire year of 2006 in the diocesan Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. It is for this reason that in preparation for the Olympics, the date of 8 December takes on a festive meaning, namely: "A light for sports".

For Christians, reference made to light points out the Incarnate Word, Light of the world that illumines man in all his dimensions, including sports. There is nothing human - except sin - that the Son of God by becoming man did not give worth to. He "worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved", as the Second Vatican Council reminded us 40 years ago in Gaudium et Spes (n. 22).

Among the various human activities is sport, itself awaiting to be illumined by God through Christ so that the values it expresses are purified and elevated both at the individual and collective level.

From this moment, I assure you of my prayer, so that the upcoming Olympic Games serve as an opportune occasion for believers to reflect, as the Apostle
Paul suggested to the Christians of Corinth, upon the directions that can also be applied to spiritual training that derive from sport (cf. I Cor 9: 24-27).

May the upcoming Olympic Games also be for everyone an eloquent sign of friendship and contribute to strengthening relations of solid understanding between peoples! How can we fail to recognize how necessary this is in our day, where humanity is marked by many tensions and is yearning to build a future of authentic peace?

I invoke the heavenly intercession of Mary Immaculate so that the light of Christ, which she perfectly reflects with her entire existence, may enlighten the souls of those who, in one way or another, will be taking part in the Olympics.

To them, as to you, venerable Brother, to Bishop Alfonso Badini Confalonieri of Susa and to Bishop Piergiorgio Debernardi of Pinerolo and to the respective diocesan Communities, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI
FOOTBALL CAN BE MORE THAN JUST ENTERTAINMENT

Text of the speech given by the Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, during the radio program 'Towards Sunday' of June 3, 1978.

When one looks at the newspapers or in radio and TV programs these days (June 1978), one can easily see that one subject dominates: the World Cup in football. In 1970, 700 million people watched the World Cup Games on television; this year it will certainly be more. Football has become a global event which has brought men from all around the world across all boundaries into one and the same 'place for the soul', where they are united by hopes, anxieties, passions and joy. Hardly any other event on earth can achieve a similar widespread effect.

That shows that it must address something primal in men and leads us to ask where the power of sport lies. The pessimist will say, it is like it was in ancient Rome. The word for the masses was 'panem et circenses' -bread and circuses. Food and play make up the lifestyle of a decadent society which knows of no higher goal.

But even when one accepts this, it is not enough. One must then ask: What is the fascination of play that it can have equal importance as food? One can answer that by looking back at ancient Rome, in which the cry for bread and circuses was really the expression of a desire for a paradisiacal life, for a life of satiety without effort, and of fulfilled leisure. Because that is what play means: action, that is truly free - without a goal and without a need to do it - while harnessing and fulfilling all of one’s personal forces.

In this sense, sport becomes a sort of foretaste of Paradise: a stepping out of the slavish earnestness of our daily life and its concerns into the free seriousness of something that should not be serious and is therefore beautiful. In that way sport overcomes daily life. But it has another character, especially with children: It is a training for life. It symbolizes life itself carried forward in freeform manner.

It seems to me the fascination of football consists of the fact that it unites both aspects in a very persuasive manner. It compels a man to take himself in hand so that through training, he may gain control over himself; through control, mastery; and through mastery, freedom. It also teaches him, however, a disciplined cooperation with others. In team play, he learns to put his individuality in the service of the whole. Sport unites people in a common goal: the success and failure of each one lies in the success or failure of everyone.
And finally, sport teaches fair competition, in which the rules of the game, which everyone mutually supports, binds and unites the competitors. The freedom of playfulness, when everything is played as it should, the seriousness of competition, resolves into the freedom of a completed game.

In watching a game, the spectator identifies himself with the game and the players. He feels himself part of both the team play and the competition, he participates in the players’ seriousness and in their freedom of action. The players become a symbol of his own life; and that works vice-versa. The players know that the spectators are seeing themselves represented in them, being affirmed by them.

Of course, all of this can be spoiled by commercialism, which casts the grim pall of money over everything, and changes sport into an industry which can produce an unreal world of horrifying dimensions.

But this illusory world cannot exist when sport is based on positive values: as training for life and as a stepping over from our daily life in the direction of our lost Paradise.

In both cases however, it means to find a discipline for freedom, to train oneself to follow the rules of teamwork, of competition and of self-discipline. Perhaps if we think of these, we can learn from sport to live anew.

Because sport makes fundamentals visible: Man does not live by bread alone. Yes, the material world is only the preliminary stage for the truly human, the world of freedom. But that freedom is based on rules, on the discipline of teamwork and fair competition, independent of outward success or arbitrariness, and is thereby truly free. Sport as life. If we look at it profoundly, then the phenomenon of a football-crazy world can give us more than sheer entertainment.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger