

Sunday 12th July 2009

Homily for the European Meeting of the Pueri Cantores in Stockholm

Dear Pueri Cantores,
Dear boys and girls,

Welcome to this ceremony! I am very happy to be here with you and it is with great joy that I bring you the Pope Benedict's warmest greetings from Rome. As you know, the Pope is very fond of church music and a great friend of Pueri Cantores. Therefore he is happy and grateful that you devote your time and talent to make worship so beautiful and dignified.

I can say the same. When I was a boy, my father was the conductor of the local choir. He used to play the organ with one hand, and conduct with the other. I was allowed to sit next to him at the organ. I would try sometimes to pull a stop... then he had to use his hand to tap me on my fingers! Later at school I learned to play the organ, myself. However – I have to say – my singing has never been that great! I cannot compete with you for sure! But I still enjoy Church music very much, and want to congratulate you for your beautiful, deeply touching singing. Two things can be said - one: singing belongs to worshipping; two: worshipping belongs to singing.

First: singing belongs to worshipping. Without any singing, there would not be any true celebration. The psalms say it clearly: "Sing to the Lord a new song, all the people on the earth!" We also know that, after the last supper, Jesus and his disciples were singing while going to the olive grove. Singing also characterized the celebration of the first Christian communities, and continued throughout the centuries in the whole history of the Church.

Especially in cloisters and monasteries the community would sing, mainly chorally. The great musicians, Orlando di Lasso, Palestrina, Bach, Mozart, Bruckner and many others composed oratorios, passions, and other church hymns. Of course there is good church music also today, like the gospels and the music performed in Taizé.

Why does singing belong to worshipping? While worshipping we experience that God made the world, the mountains, the seas, the flowers and especially human beings beautiful. We only need to open our eyes... and immediately comes the urges to sing: "Te Deum!"-"Great God we praise you" "Laudate Dominum!"-"Praise the Lord, the mighty Lord of armies". We then need to stop and think: How great, strong and beautiful must be the Creator himself? Therefore we sing *in Gloria* "Laudamus te!" "We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory".

Not every day, however, we feel like singing. Sometimes we are down and think: nobody cares about me, nobody knows how I feel. But, all of a sudden, we realize that yes, there is

somebody that listens to us and understands us, to whom we can always speak. So we can call out and sing: “out of the depths I have cried to you o Lord, Lord hear my voice”. “Kyrie eleison!”-“Lord have mercy!”

The Gospel teach us what God as done for us out of love: he has not even spared his own son: he has become man, he has died on the cross and has shown us the way to eternal life, to heaven. How can we not be happy to be Christians, how can we not rejoice and sing: “Alleluia”. “We proclaim your death, Lord Jesus Christ, until you come in glory”.

This is why singing belongs to worshipping. But it goes both ways: worshipping belongs to singing. Only someone who has a pure and joyful heart can sing, since he knows: “no matter what happens, I am redeemed, God loves me, God loves everybody and cares for us all”. When this faith is missing – and this is the case unfortunately for many people today – it is easy to feel down, disoriented and hopeless, to feel desperate in the face of all the evils and injustices of the world, it is easy to start to criticize and complain about everything. The faith in God, the certainty that he is here with us, gives us courage, trust and hope, it can turn us into singers and musicians despite all adverse circumstances. And – as you all know very well – when we sing and play, we not only forget our sufferings, we overcome it.

When we sing, we worship, we express our faith and deepen it, we play and keep our prayer alive. When you sing with a faithful heart, you singing are not only pleasant, even excellent from an artistic point of view: it has a soul. Those who are singing like this, pray twice.

This takes me to the third point, which is very important to me. You have a great task, actually a real mission, with your singing. Many people, many of your peers, know very little – if anything – about God, Jesus Christ, and the Church. They are not interested, they do not feel involved. Many of them turn their lives toward useless things, sometimes even damaging things like alcohol and drugs. This makes them feel good for a while... but the consequences are rather unpleasant, if not destructive.

I call to mind a famous example. Saint Augustine, one of the greatest theologians in the whole of Church history, led a rather irregular life for many years before his baptism in Rome. But he was a serious man searching for more: he wanted to improve. So he passed from one philosophy to another without finding the one that could satisfy him completely. Then he entered the cathedral in Milan where the great Bishop Ambrose was preaching and heard the singing. Maybe there were already at that time Pueri Cantores like you. In his Confessions, Augustine thanks God and writes:

“How did I weep, in your Hymns and Canticles, touched to the quick by the voices of your sweet attuned Church! The voices flowed into my ears, and the Truth distilled into my heart,

whence the affections of my devotion overflowed, and tears ran down, and happy was I therein" (Confessions, IX, 6). Through the music that Augustine heard there, God entered his heart and revealed to him the truth that the song was proclaiming. That music was therefore the voice of truth for Augustine, and led to his conversion and baptism. Later he became the great Bishop and Saint, whose book we still study today.

Dear boys and girls, your singing is not only something that you enjoy: through your singing you can make other rejoice, you can comfort and encourage them. You can show them that the faith is beautiful and meaningful, that faith gives hope and courage. You can help other people, maybe even help them to believe. You can truly become a blessing for many.

Therefore I want to thank you again for you singing. Thank you for coming to Stockholm, and for bringing us all joy. Please never stop. Keep singing: "Praise the Lord, my soul!" Play and sing to the Lord. Alleluia. Amen.