

**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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