



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE "SCHOLAE CANTORUM" OF THE ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SAINT CECILIA**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 28 September 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you all: from the President, Msgr. Tarcisio Cola, whom I thank for his words, to the Board of Directors and to you: singers, choir directors and organists, gathered together from various parts of Italy.

You are part of the worthy Italian *Santa Cecilia* Association, ancient – founded 140 years ago – and still alive and active and eager to serve the Church. The affection and esteem of the Popes for this Association is well known, especially of Saint Pius X, who gave the people of God organic provisions on religious music (cf. *Motu Proprio Tra le sollecitudini*, 22 November 1903). Saint Paul VI wanted them to be renewed and active to provide for a music that integrates with the liturgy and that derives its fundamental characteristics from it. Not just any music, but holy music, because rituals are holy; endowed with the nobility of art, because God must be given the best; universal, so that everyone can understand and celebrate. Above all, clearly distinct and different from that used for other purposes. And he recommended that you cultivate the *sensus ecclesiae*, the discernment of music in the liturgy. He said: “Not everything is valid, not everything is licit, not everything is good. Here the sacred must join with the beautiful in a harmonious and devout synthesis” (*Address to the religious sisters in charge of liturgical singing*, 15 April 1971). Benedict XVI urged you not to forget the musical heritage of the past, to renew it and increase it with new compositions.

Dear friends, I also encourage you to continue along this path. Being an association is a resource: it helps you to generate movement, interest, commitment to better serve the liturgy. An association

that is not a protagonist or owner of any music, but that has as its program love and fidelity to the Church. Together you can better engage in singing as an integral part of the liturgy, inspired by the first model, Gregorian chant. Together you take care of the artistic and liturgical preparation, and you promote the presence of the *schola cantorum* in every parish community. The choir guides the assembly and – with its specific repertoires – is a qualified voice of spirituality, communion, tradition and liturgical culture. I recommend that you help to sing the whole people of God, with conscious and active participation in the Liturgy. This is important: closeness to the people of God.

There are various fields of your apostolate: the composition of new melodies; promoting singing in seminaries and houses of religious formation; supporting parish choirs, organists, schools of sacred music, young people. Singing, playing, composing, directing and making music in the Church are among the most beautiful things for the glory of God. It is a privilege, a gift from God to express the art of music and to assist participation in the divine mysteries. Beautiful and good music is a privileged tool for approaching the transcendent, and often helps to understand a message even those who are distracted.

I know that your preparation involves sacrifice in terms of the availability of time to devote to rehearsals, to the involvement of people, to performances on feast days, when perhaps friends invite you to go for a walk. Many times! But your dedication to the liturgy and its music represents a way of evangelization at all levels, from children to adults. In fact, the liturgy is the first “teacher” of catechism. Do not forget this: the liturgy is the first “teacher” of catechism.

Sacred music also carries out another task, that of bringing together Christian history: in the liturgy, Gregorian chant, polyphony, popular music and contemporary music resonate. It is as though, in that moment, there were all the past and present generations praising God, each with its own sensitivity. Not only that, but sacred music – and music in general – creates bridges, brings people closer, even the most distant; it knows no barriers of nationality, ethnicity, or skin colour, but involves everyone in a higher language, and always manages to bring together people and groups even from very different backgrounds. Religious music shortens distances, even between those brothers and sisters who sometimes do not feel they are close. For this reason, in each parish the singing group is a group where one encounters availability and mutual help.

For all this, dear brothers, I thank you and I encourage you. May the Lord help you to be constant in your effort. The Church esteems the service you provide in the communities: you help them to feel the attraction of beauty, which detoxifies from mediocrity, raises them upwards, towards God, and unites hearts in praise and tenderness. I bless you and all the members of the *Santa Cecilia* Association. May Our Lady protect you. And since those who sing pray twice, I trust that you will also pray for me. Thank you!

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