

BENEDICT XVI
Speech to the Austrian National Ski team
6 October 2007¹

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, 2007²

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

¹ *Cfr.* “La traccia: l’insegnamento di Benedetto XVI”, Ott. 2007, pp.1176-77.

² *Cf.* *Siate atleti che cercano il premio sella vita cristiana* in “La Traccia: Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI” , Oct. 2007, 1176-1177 [our translation].

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.