

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

*His Excellency
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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

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