



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERRAL OF HONORARY
CITIZENSHIP OF NATZ-SCHABS/NAZ-SCIAVES (BOLZANO, ITALY)**

Wednesday, 9 November 2011

*Esteemed and dear Mr Mayor,
Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,
Dear Friends of Natz-Schabs,*

I can only say a heartfelt “*Vergelt’s Gott*” [may God reward you] for the great honour that you have given me, now an honorary citizen of your Municipality and, therefore, at home with you, also from a legal and statistical viewpoint. Thank you for the beautiful picture you have given me; now I can always “stroll” through your Municipality and, in this way, feel at home even though I fear that it will not be possible for me to come there again in person, but I shall only be able to look at Natz-Schabs from above. However in my heart I am with you and I am truly pleased with this gift you have given me.

South Tyrol is a special land and it was impressed on my heart through my mother’s stories. I, myself, was unable to meet my great-grandmother and my grandmother died when I was three years old. However many stories about her have lived on, especially the fact that throughout her life she was homesick for South Tyrol and inwardly never felt at home in Bavaria. During her final illness she said: “If only I could have a bucket of water from my house, I would certainly recover!”. She could not recover but lived on the “waters” of her homeland and because of this she had a difficult life, but at the same time a full and rich one.

This reminds me of another little story. As a girl, my mother worked for the Kufstein family. There she found a friend, who eventually married a baker, whom I also met as a child. She loved this friend who often said to her: “Mariedl, you should know that the angels ‘made’ the Tyrol!”. Our mother kept this saying as a kind of testament and handed it down to us too. She was deeply

convinced that this was true. Then in 1940, when I was 13 years old, my two siblings and I went to North Tyrol on a bike trip and we were able to confirm that it was true that the angels had made the land.

In the 1950s I also went to South Tyrol where I could perceive that special closeness to God that is expressed in the beauty of these lands. However it did not become so beautiful thanks to Creation alone but also because of the people who responded to the Creator. If we think of the Gothic bell towers, the beautiful houses, the kindness and friendliness of the people, and the fine music, we know that the people responded and through the collaboration of the Creator, his angels and men and women, it became a very beautiful land, an extraordinarily splendid land. I am very proud and happy to be part of it, in one way or another.

My wish at this moment is that it will remain such. Mr Mayor, you said that the church still stands in the middle of the town and expresses the communion that keeps people united. At the same time, it is also a sign of openness. It opens the community beyond the valley to all of Christianity, to the world, and leads people to assume their common responsibility. Therefore my hope is that it may remain the same: that nature, creation and the existence of people be gathered in a single harmony; that faith be a herald of joy and help in overcoming difficult situations too. My great-grandmother left, I believe, because her home was threatened by the waters.

I also hope the strength may be born to maintain this land forever anew, every generation should make a fresh start — as beautiful as it is — beautiful from the inside. Therefore may it stay a homeland that helps people live their human lives correctly.

“*Vergelt's Gott*” in everything, and may God's blessing be upon you all!