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Pope Francis: Singing can touch hearts and deepen prayer

Pope Francis meets with young singers of the Pueri Cantores Federation, and praises choral singing as a joyful accompaniment to the prayer of the Church community.

By Devin Watkins

"Singing and music can touch hearts, give beauty, and restore zest and hope".

Pope Francis offered that reflection on Saturday as he met with members of the International Federation of *Pueri Cantores*.

The group was founded in 1950 in France by Father Fernand Maillet, and later grew into a federation of children's and youth choirs, boasting over 1,000 members from 25 countries. The Federation brings children together from around the world each year to sing for peace, praise the Lord, and have fun making music together, according to its website.

In his address, the Pope praised their beautiful choral singing which had welcomed him to the hall in the Vatican.

He also thanked them for their efforts to help people to pray and open their hearts to the Lord.

Joyful harmony

Pope Francis reflected on three key words: joy, prayer, and humility.

“Singing is joy, especially when it is done in choir,” he noted, adding that countless other children and adults have sung the same notes, handing down their own joy of singing.

He said those children were just like them, “full of life and dreams, who loved playing, and being together, and who generously devoted time and effort to learning, performing, and handing on what they had received.”

The Pope added that music has the power to touch people’s lives and shake them out of their unhappiness or boredom.

“When you put enthusiasm into your singing, you give a great gift to those who hear you,” he said. “How much we need joy in our world!”

Prayerful accompaniment

Turning to prayer, Pope Francis reminded the young singers that they are not “performers” but assistants who help others to pray with their singing.

“If your heart is full of love for Jesus, it shines through in your voices,” he said. “It is like an arrow that hits the mark, reaching people’s hearts.”

He recalled St. Augustine’s saying that those who sing pray twice, noting that singing is an act of love when done with devotion and art.

“By singing and praying together, in harmony, listening to one another, waiting for one another, adding your own voice and movement to those of everyone else, you help the larger community to do the same,” he said. “You teach how good it is to walk and grow together.”

Humble servants of God

The Pope then reflected on the theme of humility, pointing out that singing is “a school of humility” since each person must be at the service of others, even the director.

“Your singing, is all the more humble because it is at the service of God,” he said. “While it helps others to encounter the Lord, it is also able to step aside at the right moment, to leave room for silence, so that everyone can listen quietly to the words that only Jesus wants to say to each one of us.”

Pope Francis cautioned the young singers not to draw attention to themselves with their singing, since they only risk spoiling the hard work of the entire choir.

“So, do not try to stand out, seek to sing as one, with the unity that comes from humility; in this way your singing can express true friendship, with God and with one another.”

Singing with passion

In conclusion, the Holy Father said that singing requires great effort in order to achieve harmony and beauty.

Sacred music, he added, can teach Christians many things, especially since its “soul is the word of God.”

And he concluded by urging the children to sing with passion, with the help of their teachers.

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