



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE PONTIFICAL SWISS GUARD

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 5 May 2014*

Distinguished Commandant, Dear Guards, Dear Family and Friends of the Pontifical Swiss Guard,

It is with joy that I meet you on this important day for you, a day of celebration! I greet you all with affection and gratitude. The sixth of May is a date that will remain impressed in your minds and will allow you, over the course of your lives, to relive with joy an important moment of your time in the Swiss Guard. It is a special day, for we commemorate the Sack of Rome and the heroic action of your predecessors who, in 1527, offered their lives in defence of the Church and the Pope. Your dedication confirms that their courage and fidelity have born fruit, as the Gospel says: the seed which was sown and died in the earth has grown (cf. Jn 12:24).

The social and ecclesial context has changed much since then. Society is different than it was in those days. Yet the heart of man, his capacity for being faithful and courageous — *acriter et fideliter*, your motto states — has remained the same. Your service is therefore an authentic witness, for it concretely expresses the desire to dedicate oneself to an important and demanding commitment. You arrived at this decision with the help of your families and the communities that formed and educated you. My sincere gratitude goes to them as well.

Serving in the Pontifical Swiss Guard means experiencing a special intersection of time and space: Rome has a wealth of monuments, historical sites and artistic places which manifest the grandeur of its culture and its history. Yet this City is not only a great museum but also a crossroads for tourists and pilgrims from all over the world: people of different languages, traditions, religions and cultures come here for various reasons. Each one of you is part of this passage in history and personal stories. Through your unique service, you are called to give a serene and joyous Christian witness to all those who come to the Vatican to visit the Basilica of St

Peter and to meet the Pope. Live your days intensely! Be strong in your faith and generous in charity toward the people you meet.

The uniform you wear this year celebrates its centenary. Its colours and design are known throughout the world: they serve as a reminder of dedication, reliability and security. They identify a unique service and a glorious past. Yet behind every uniform there is a real person: with a family and a homeland, with a personality and sensibilities, with aspirations and plans for life. Your uniform is a striking feature of the Swiss Guard and it attracts people's attention. However, remember that it is not the uniform, but rather he who wears it who must strike others by his kindness, by his spirit of welcome, by his attitude of charity to all. Consider this also in your relationships among yourselves, by giving importance, also in your community life, to sharing the happy moments and the more difficult ones, by not ignoring those among you who are struggling and sometimes need a smile and a gesture of encouragement and friendship; avoiding a negative distance that divides companions and that, in the life of anyone in the world, can generate contempt, marginalization and racism.

Dear Swiss Guards, every day I am able to experience up close your dedication and your commitment: I am very grateful to you for this! Be faithful to what has grown and developed in your heart and be certain that the Lord is always at your side and supports your journey, especially when the path is arduous and uncertain. He never abandons us! I also wish to express my closeness to you and, as I entrust you and your families to the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the intercession of your Patron Saints Nicholas, Sebastian and Martin, I bless you from the heart.