

Over sport en doping

Address of his holiness Benedict XVI to participants in the thirty-second world congress sponsored by the International Organisation of Sports Medicine (FIMS)



Hall of the Swiss, Apostolic Palace of Castel Gandolfo
Paus Benedictus XVI
27 september 2012

Distinguished Guests, dear Friends,

I am pleased to welcome to Castel Gandolfo the representatives of the thirty-second World Congress of Sports Medicine as, for the first time in your history, you hold your biennial Congress in Rome. I would also like to thank Doctor Maurizio Casasco for his kind words on your behalf.

On this occasion, it seemed appropriate to offer you a few thoughts on the care of athletes and of participants in sports. I understand that you who have come for the Congress hail from one hundred and seventeen countries and five continents, your diversity being an important sign of the ubiquity of athletics across cultures, regions and circumstances. It is also a significant indication of the capacity for sports and athletic endeavours to unite persons and peoples in the common pursuit of peaceful competitive excellence. The recent Olympics and Paralympics in London made this clear. The universal appeal and importance of athletics and the field of sports medicine are also justly reflected in the theme of your Congress this year, which speaks of the worldwide implications of your work, and its potential to inspire many different people all around the globe.

As Doctor Casasco rightly pointed out in his speech, you as medical experts recognize that the starting point of all your work is the individual athlete whom you serve. Just as sport is more than just competition, each sportsman and woman is more than a mere competitor: they are possessed of a moral and spiritual capacity which ought to be enriched and deepened by sports and sports medicine. Sometimes, however, success, fame, medals and the pursuit of money become the primary, or even sole, motive for those involved. It has even happened from time to time that winning at all costs has replaced the true spirit of sport and has led to the abuse and misuse of the means at the disposal of modern medicine.

You, as practitioners of sports medicine, are aware of this temptation and I know that you are discussing this important question during your Congress. This is surely because you too appreciate that those whom you care for are unique and gifted individuals, regardless of athletic capabilities, and that they are called to moral and spiritual perfection prior to the call to any physical achievement. Indeed, Saint Paul notes in his first letter to the Corinthians, that spiritual and athletic excellence are closely related, and he exhorts believers to train themselves in the spiritual life. "Every athlete", he says, "exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (9:25). This is why, dear friends, I urge you to continue to keep before you the dignity of those whom you assist by your professional medical work. In this way, you will be agents not only of physical healing and athletic excellence, but also of moral, spiritual and cultural regeneration.

As the Lord himself took human flesh and became man, so each human person is called to reflect perfectly the image and likeness of God. I therefore pray for you and for those whom your work benefits, that your efforts will lead to an ever more profound appreciation of the beauty, the mystery and the potential of each human person, athletic or otherwise, able-bodied or physically challenged. May your professionalism, good counsel and friendship benefit all those whom you are called to serve. With these thoughts, I invoke upon you and those whom you serve God's abundant blessings! Thank you.