

Children must be guided early on with God's law

VATICAN CITY – Young children must be guided from a very early age with moral law so that they will have direction as they weather life's storms and resist its temptations, Pope Benedict XVI said.

"God's law must be impressed on the soul from the beginning 'like on a piece of wax,'" the pope said, citing the teachings of St. John Chrysostom at his Sept. 19 weekly general audience.

Early infancy "is in fact the age that is the most important" because it marks the time when "the great directives that point to the right course to (take in) life" really take hold in a person, he said.

Pope Benedict returned briefly to the Vatican from his papal summer villa south of Rome for the weekly audience in St. Peter's Square.

The pope dedicated his talk to the life and writings of St. John Chrysostom, the fourth-century doctor of the church and archbishop of Constantinople, now Istanbul, Turkey. The 1,600th anniversary of his death is being celebrated this year.

The saint saw that humanity must strive to first accurately know "true doctrine" and then translate it into one's own life by following moral principles and virtues, the pope said.

He said St. John Chrysostom urged people to provide children early on with the "spiritual weapons" they would need to protect themselves later during adolescence and the teen years from "the violent winds" of lust and other strong desires.

Aided by the virtue of temperance and a solid Christian formation, "well-prepared married couples thus block off the road to divorce," he said.

Everything in life will unfold "with joy and (parents) can teach their children the virtues," the pope said.

With the birth of a child, "the three become just one flesh" as the child is the bridge that connects the two parents creating "a tiny church" – a domestic church, he said, quoting St. John Chrysostom.

St. John Chrysostom also reminded the lay faithful that they are responsible for the salvation of others, the pope said.

St. John Chrysostom said that as social beings people are not meant to just be

interested in themselves, said the pope. Through baptism, every Christian becomes “king, priest, and prophet” who is responsible for bringing the truth of Christ to the world, the pope said.

Among the 15,000 faithful gathered in the square were Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston and Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Methodios of Boston. The two leaders were heading a 100-member Catholic-Orthodox ecumenical pilgrimage from the United States to Rome, then Istanbul, Turkey, and ending in St. Petersburg, Russia. St. John Chrysostom, whose Western feast day was Sept. 13, led the church of Constantinople before the split between the Christian East and West and is venerated as a doctor of the church by Catholics and Orthodox.