

# Pope tells Italian police to recognize God in all people

VATICAN CITY - Meeting with the Italian police who ensure his security when he is outside the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI said humanity will struggle to see itself as one family unless people believe in God and recognize all were created by him.

"Let us be clear: Without the transcendent foundation, which is God, society risks becoming simply a group of neighbors (and) ceases being a community of brothers and sisters called to form one large family," the pope said Jan. 11.

He asked the officers to make sure that in all their dealings with the public they consciously seek "the face of a brother or a sister whom God places on your path, a friend, even if unknown, to be welcomed and assisted with patient listening."

Seeing everyone as a creature of God, one recognizes the supreme value of that person, the pope told the officers.

"It is thanks to this awareness that the prerequisites for building a peaceful humanity can be met," he said.

On the eve of the papal meeting, the Vatican newspaper interviewed the director of the department within the Italian police force responsible for the Vatican, Vincenzo Caso, and began by asking if he could do something to ease the inconvenience pilgrims face going through security to get into papal events or just into St. Peter's Basilica.

"I'm sincerely sorry," he said, "but a terrorist attack can be countered only with prevention." The security of the pope, the Vatican and the thousands of visitors who arrive each day "is much more important than the bother caused."

Caso's department is responsible for the security of the pope and top Vatican officials when they are on Italian territory and for patrolling the perimeter of the Vatican and access to its public entrances.

The same 12 officers, including Caso, are at the pope's side anytime he is in Italy outside the Vatican. The permanent assignment of the 12 "gives us a certain familiarity in fulfilling our mission and, especially, helps us construct that necessary affinity and harmony of movement which is essential," he said.

There also are 14 officers on motorcycles who escort the papal vehicle and dozens of undercover agents who mix in with the crowds, Caso said. In addition, the squad includes 12 agents who handle the permits the thousands of foreign priests and religious need to stay legally in Italy for work or study.

Caso, a career police officer, is set to retire Jan. 31 after almost three years as director of the unit.

During the meeting with the pope, Caso told him that his best memories were tied to the time he spent walking a few paces ahead of or alongside the pope in the mountains of northern Italy during Pope Benedict's summer vacations.

"The joy of the faithful that Your Holiness casually encountered during the afternoon walks is the purest and most spontaneous witness of the love the people have for you," Caso said. "I was particularly struck, if I may say so, by your affectionate simplicity during these meetings."