

# Shuttle, ISS astronauts get a “Popespace” page

Watching the video, it's hard to tell who is more impressed at being part of the conversation: Pope Benedict XVI or the dozen astronauts on the International Space Station who chatted via video link May 21. The pope thanked the spacefarers for their courage and willingness to place the results of their endeavors at the disposal of all people.

“This conversation gives me the chance to express my own admiration and appreciation to you and to all those who collaborate in making your mission possible, and to add my heartfelt encouragement to bring it to a safe and successful conclusion,” the pope said.

“But this is a conversation, so I must not be the only one doing the talking. I am very curious to hear you tell me about your experiences and your reflections. If you don't mind, I would like to ask you a few questions.”

If you don't mind ...? Most people never have the chance to have a “sit-down” with the pope, and here the pope wants to ask **them** the questions. Yes, it appeared the astronauts were eager to answer.

He asked about seeing the earth from space, and why people on earth fight when, as is often said, you can't see borders from space. Endeavor Mission Commander Mark Kelly thanked Pope Benedict for acknowledging the violent attack in which his wife, Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, and others were injured and nine were killed. Kelly noted that much of the fighting on the globe is about resources and energy, but that the space station and shuttle make the most of available energy with solar panels and fuel cells. He said he hopes that lessons learned in space can be adapted to earth-bound technologies so nations will have less incentive to fight. “If those technologies could be adapted more on earth, we could possibly reduce some of that violence.”

The church has been criticized in the past for relying too much on faith, and not

understanding science. These folks love to point out (erroneously) that Galileo was excommunicated for his observation that the earth revolved around the sun. Many fail to acknowledge the great role the church plays in scientific exploration and discussion through the Vatican Observatory – the operator of a couple of the world’s most prominent space telescopes, one just outside Rome and another near Tucson, Ariz. – and through the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

The 17-minute link-up between the pope and the astronauts illustrated the best of the church and the scientific community – an exchange of ideas between faith and science, between the Vatican and low earth orbit. Both have much to share with each other. Scientists can study the cosmos and still be amazed at the beauty of creation; and they can be men and women of fervent prayer. And people of faith can understand that the Creator who designed the universe has given us much to study and explore, and that math and science have much to teach us about ourselves, about God and his creation.

*Gunty is associate publisher/editor of The Catholic Review. To view the NASA video on the link-up between the Vatican and the ISS, visit [CatholicReview.org/guntyblog](http://CatholicReview.org/guntyblog).*