

LATEST NEWS # 531, July 10, 2008

The following news concerns Italy.

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Pope Benedict to lead marathon public Bible reading

ITALY – Pope Benedict XVI is to be the opening reader in a continuous public reading of the entire Bible due to be held in Rome in October and broadcast in its entirety on television.

According to the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Monsignor Gianfranco Ravasi, the Pope's participation is "an appeal to the Catholic Church to go back to studying and deepening its knowledge of the holy Scriptures."

Some 1200 readers will perform the reading, from Genesis to Revelation, which will continue day and night and is expected to last between 135 and 140 hours, from October 5 – 11. It will take place in Rome's fourth century Basilica Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.

At the instigation of the Italian Catholic Church, the Bible Society in Italy has been invited to join the committee promoting the event. Prof Daniele Garrone, the Chairman of the Bible Society, stressed that readers of all Christian confessions would be taking part, reading the unadorned Bible text. The event will serve as a reminder both of the important cultural role the Bible plays in western culture and history, and of the freedom that people in the West have to read it – a freedom not granted everywhere.

The Pope's reading of the first two chapters of Genesis in Italian will be followed by the Rabbi of Rome, Prof Riccardo Di Segni, reading the same text in Hebrew. A representative of the Orthodox Churches will then read Genesis 2: 4b-23 – again in Italian – and an international representative of the Protestant Churches will continue with Genesis 3. A family will read Chapters 4 and 5, which tell the story of Adam and Eve's children and their descendants.

The rest of the text will be read in five- to eight-minute sections, all in Italian with the exception of the first chapter of the Gospel of John, which will be read in Greek. The honour of taking the final reading will fall to Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of the Vatican State.

Throughout the five days, members of the public will be able to follow the readings from the open area in front of the Basilica Santa Croce, where there will also be a Bible exhibition. Scriptures in all languages will be on sale there through United Bible Societies.

The Pope's opening reading, as well as the closing of the event, will be broadcast in two 45-minute programmes on RAI1, Italy's public service television channel. RAI will also carry the entire remainder of the readings on its satellite educational channel. About six million people are expected to watch the opening and closing readings.

The event coincides with the start of the World Synod of Bishops, which meets in Rome from October 5 –26 and has as its theme 'The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church'.



Members of the 300-strong gathering of bishops and cardinals are also expected to contribute readings.

For further information please contact comms@ubs-wsc.org

