

Two traditions with one voice



At the invitation of the Pope an Anglican delegation will attend the Papal Mass in St Peter's Basilica on the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul. The delegation from Westminster Abbey in London will include several members of the clergy with the Choir and the Organist and Master of the Choristers. At the express wish of the Holy Father, the Choir of Westminster Abbey will form one choir for the Mass with the Papal Choir, the Cappella Musicale Pontificia "Sistina", under the direction of the Maestro Direttore, Mons. Massimo Palombella. In addition the Choir of Westminster Abbey, under the direction of the Abbey's Organist and Master of the Choristers, James O'Donnell, will sing music from the tradition of the Church of England. The Abbey's Sub-Organist, Robert Quinney, will accompany some of the music.

This unprecedented invitation from the Pope for a Choir to sing with the Sistine Chapel Choir at a papal liturgy is one of the fruits of the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom in September 2010 and in particular to his visit to Westminster Abbey for an ecumenical service of Evening Prayer. During that service, the Pope became acquainted with some of the rich tradition of liturgical music which is an important part of the worshipping life of the Abbey. He heard the Choir and we were pleased to send His Holiness afterwards, at his request, a selection of Compact Discs made by the Organists and Choir of the Abbey.

During their five-day visit to Italy, the Choir will sing a public concert at 7.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 27 June, in the Basilica of St Mary Major and, the following evening, a private recital for officials of the Vatican led by the Cardinal Secretary of State in the Sistine Chapel. At 7:00 p.m. on the evening of the Solemnity, 29 June, the Clergy and Choir of Westminster Abbey will conduct a service of Choral Evensong in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the titular Church of Cormac, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, the Archbishop emeritus of Westminster, at which the Cardinal himself will give the address. The service will take place in association with the Church of All Saints' Rome and with the Anglican Centre in Rome, in the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, where there will be a reception following the service.

On Saturday, 30 June, the delegation from Westminster Abbey will travel to the Abbey of Montecassino, at the invitation of the Archabbot, the Right Reverend Pietro Vittorelli, OSB, who is sadly unwell at this time, to sing First Vespers and the Sunday Mass with the monks. As Dean I am

delighted to have been invited to celebrate a Eucharist following the order of the Church of England at the Shrine of St Benedict. This happy ecumenical exchange mirrors the occasion in October last year when the Archabbot celebrated a Mass in the Shrine of St Edward King and Confessor in Westminster Abbey.

There is great significance in this visit of Westminster Abbey to Rome. The Abbey is not only known throughout the world but is also a place of peculiar importance at the heart of the life of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth. Throughout its history since 1066 Westminster Abbey has been the place of Coronation of the Kings and Queens of England and of the United Kingdom. Queen Elizabeth II was anointed and crowned Queen at a celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Abbey on 2 June 1953, in much the same way as all Her Majesty's Royal predecessors before and since the break with Rome. Royal weddings took place there in the medieval period and again in the 20th and 21st centuries. The wedding of The Queen, then Princess Elizabeth, to the Duke of Edinburgh took place there in 1947. On 29 April 2011, Queen Elizabeth II attended the wedding of her grandson Prince William of Wales, the son of the Prince of Wales, to Miss Catherine Middleton, now the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. The service was said to have been watched by 2.7 billion people, estimated to be the largest ever television audience.

The Dean and Chapter of Westminster enjoy a particular relationship with the Monarchy and the Establishment in England, being directly responsible to The Queen, the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, as Visitor of the Abbey. During the reign of King Henry VIII in the 16th century, Westminster Abbey, which had been a community of Benedictine monks for at least 600 years, was part of the movement to separate the Church of England from the jurisdiction of the Pope and from the Roman Catholic Church. In 1540 the Abbey was dissolved by the King, the monks were dispersed or served in the new dispensation and the Church became a Cathedral. When Queen Mary I re-established Roman Catholicism in England, during her brief reign, the Benedictine Abbey was restored. Finally in 1560, after Queen Elizabeth I's Anglican settlement, the Abbey having once again been dissolved was re-erected as the Collegiate Church of St Peter Westminster.

Throughout the past 450 years, the Collegiate Church of St Peter Westminster, still universally known as Westminster Abbey, has maintained the tradition of choral music as part of its daily liturgical offering. In Westminster Abbey, the Choir sings eight services a week: Matins, the Eucharist and Evensong on Sunday and a daily Choral Evensong (apart from one day when Evening Prayer is said publicly). During choir holidays, either the Lay Vicars (the singing men) of the Abbey Choir or visiting choirs maintain the pattern. The liturgical music sung in Westminster Abbey draws on the entire European tradition of church music including plainsong, and music of the Latin and English traditions since the 16th century.

It is my prayer that this visit of Westminster Abbey to Rome will be blessed by the grace of God and move us forward on the long and winding road towards full visible unity, a goal to which both the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury remain committed.

Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster - L'Osservatore Romano