

For Immediate Release

The New Benedict XVI Institute Schola Recruits 25 San Quentin Inmates to Chant at the First Latin Mass Celebrated at the Prison in Three Generations

San Francisco, Calif – August 28, 2018 – Benedict XVI Institute, a non-profit dedicated to inspiring the faithful through sacred music and art, teamed up its new Benedict XVI Institute Schola and Teaching Choir with San Quentin State Prison inmates to help celebrate the Traditional Latin Mass at the prison last Saturday, August 25, 2018, for the first time in three generations. Twenty five inmates volunteered to form a prison Schola in support of the August 25th Latin Mass earlier in the month when the Benedict XVI Institute Schola and Teaching Choir first held a concert introducing Gregorian chant to the prisoners.

In addition to the prison Schola members, an enthusiastic congregation of an additional 25 San Quentin prisoners turned out for the 4 p.m. Vigil Mass, celebrated by the Contemplatives of Saint Joseph Priest Father Cassian, assisted by Brother Marco (as server), and by the four professional voices of the Benedict XVI Teaching Choir, led by music director Rebekah Wu.

The San Quentin Schola chanted the *Jesu Dulcis Memoria* as a processional, went on to sing the lovely *O Sanctissima* for the Offertory hymn and the BXVI Teaching Choir sang Louis Vierne's (c.1870-1937) *Tantum Ergo* for the Communion meditation. The San Quentin Schola sang the *Salve Regina* as the recessional. After the *Salve Regina* ended, instead of filing out immediately, the men lingered, clearly savoring the sense of sacred beauty and of communion with God.

"None of the 25 men in the Schola had ever sung in Latin or chanted before, but they picked up the melodies in good time in part because they love to sing to God, and because there were a few experienced musicians that sat behind the novices," said Rebekah Wu. "Starting the rehearsal with prayer – asking God to teach us how to sing the text and the melody the way He wants us to glorify His name – I think, really helped."

Some of the men present remembered the Latin Mass from their boyhood days. "It's been 63 years since I've been to a Latin Mass at St. Joseph's," 'Bert' remarked. But for many, even the basics of a communion rail was a new experience. Matthew, one of the younger men present, was one of the biggest fans. "This is an answer to a prayer, a dream come true for me," he said, "I asked Archbishop Cordileone if we can have a Latin Mass and now, here it is!" Dennis, a man in his sixties, was less voluble but clearly deeply moved. "God was here," Dennis said afterwards. "God was *here*."

After the Mass, Father George Williams, S.J., the Catholic chaplain at San Quentin, asked the men if they would like the Benedict XVI Teaching choir to return and participate in the Latin Mass again. "Nearly every hand in the room shot up and waved enthusiastically," he said.

"The Benedict XVI Institute is clearly going to find a way to continue this important ministry," said Maggie Gallagher, executive director of the Benedict XVI Institute, "Ideally, we'd like to be able to bring our pro-team to rehearse weekly with the San Quentin Schola and celebrate the Latin Mass regularly, at least quarterly."

"I saw these men, who humanly speaking are in a dire situation that may seem hopeless, be lifted up to God by sacred beauty and given new hope," said Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone. "The Benedict XVI

Institute teaching choir is clearly fulfilling an important need in ordinary parishes but also for those at the margins of society.”

About Benedict XVI Institute

Under the direction of Archbishop Salvatore Cordelione, Benedict XVI Institute aims to elevate beauty and reverence in the liturgy, bringing more people closer to God and His church. It provides opportunities and practical resources to help increase the adoption of sacred music and promote a vibrant Catholic culture of the arts. Benedict XVI Institute hopes to be a driving force for increasing active participation in the liturgy - setting hearts on fire for the Lord. Through its Chant Camps, Chant Camp in a Box Curriculum and Music Workshops, Benedict XVI teaches children the beauty and tradition of sacred music. The Benedict XVI Teaching Choir helps parishes with the adoption of sacred music in their liturgies. [Catholic Arts Today](#), a new online magazine published by Benedict XVI Institute, connects a new community of Catholic artists together and inspires them to new heights of excellence in the arts. And, special events, such as the San Quentin Schola, Mass of Americas and Solemn Requiem Masses, open new opportunities for Catholics to experience sacred music, in some cases, for the first time. For more information, visit www.benedictinstitute.org

Press Contact: If you'd like photos to accompany this story or to speak to a Benedict XVI spokesperson, please contact John Sperrazzo at (858) 361-4495.