

Papal call to the Space Station



21 May 2011

It was a first for the crew of the International Space Station: a papal call. His Holiness Benedict XVI talked with the astronauts in orbit for about 20 minutes on Saturday afternoon in an event webcast live from the Vatican Library.

An interior view of the International Space Station showing all 12 astronauts aboard was beamed to a TV screen in the Foconi Room of the Vatican Library at 13:11 CEST (11:11 GMT) on Saturday.

After a customary voice check, ESA's Director for Human Spaceflight and Operations, Thomas Reiter, handed the microphone over to Enrico Saggese, President of the Italian Space Agency, who introduced the Station's commander, Dmitri Kondratyev, to the Pope.

After exchanging a few words with His Holiness, Kondratyev presented the Station crew before Space Shuttle commander Mark Kelly introduced his crew.

The Pope talked of the importance of science and exploration, and noted the importance of protecting our environment. After his kind words, His Holiness asked about world peace, the views from the unique vantage point of the astronauts and their work on the Station. He noted the position of the astronauts as role models.



His Holiness Benedict XVI talking with the astronauts

After speaking with His Holiness, Roberto Vittori showed a coin given to him by the Pope, letting it float to Paolo Nespoli, who will bring it back to Earth next Tuesday morning.

Finally, His Holiness addressed Paolo in Italian, expressing his condolences for the recent loss of the astronaut's mother.

Vatican and space

His Holiness Benedict XVI has shown deep interest in astronomy and science. In 2009, during the International Year of Astronomy, he noted that our time is "positioned on the threshold of yet greater scientific discoveries."



Paul VI watching Apollo 11 landing

"Who can deny," the Pope stated, "that the responsibility for the future of humanity and also the respect for nature and the world around us, demands, now more than ever, the careful observation, the critical judgement, the patience and the discipline that are essential to the modern scientific method?"

The Vatican Observatory is one of the oldest astronomical research institutions in the world and a leader in astronomy. Its main office is at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, outside Rome. Its research centre, the Vatican Observatory Research Group, is located at the University of Arizona in Tucson, USA.

The most famous papal message to space was left on the Moon by the Apollo 11 astronauts in 1969. "I look up at your heavens, made by your fingers, at the moon and stars you set in place," said Pope Paul VI, quoting from the Psalms.

Watch the replay

The replay of the event is available in ESA's video archive multimedia.esa.int

Updates on the event are at www.twitter.com/esa

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- DAMA Mission (http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/DAMA_mission/index.html)
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Related links

- Italian Space Agency (<http://www.asi.it>)
 - Vatican: the Holy See (<http://www.vatican.va/>)
 - STS-134 mission (NASA) (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/shuttle/shuttlemissions/sts134/index.html)
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