



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Greetings to the pilgrims in the Vatican Basilica

Apostolic Journey to Santiago de Compostela and Barcelona

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today I would like, with you, to think back to the Apostolic Journey to Santiago de Compostela and Barcelona which I had the joy to make last Saturday and Sunday. I went there to strengthen my brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22:32); I did so as a witness of the Risen Christ, as a sower of the hope that does not disappoint or deceive because it stems from God's infinite love for all humanity.

My first stopover was Santiago. From the Welcome Ceremony I could feel the affection of the people of Spain for the Successor of Peter. I was truly welcomed with great enthusiasm and warmth. In this Compostelian Holy Year, I wanted to go as a pilgrim with all those who went in great numbers to that famous Shrine. I was able to visit the "House of the Apostle James the Greater", who continues to repeat to those who come in need of grace that in Christ God came into the world to reconcile it to himself and not to blame men and women for their sins.

In the impressive Cathedral of Compostela, giving the traditional embrace to the Saint with emotion, I thought of how this gesture of welcome and friendship is also a way of expressing adherence to his word and participation in his mission. It is a strong sign of the desire to be

conformed to the apostolic message. On the one hand this commits us to being faithful custodians of the Good News that the Apostles passed on, without giving in to the temptation to change it, diminish it or adapt it to suit other interests, and on the other, it transforms each one of us into tireless heralds of faith in Christ, with words and the witness of our lives in all sectors of society.

In seeing the number of pilgrims present at the solemn Holy Mass at which I had the joy of presiding in Santiago, I thought about what it is that impels so many people to leave their daily occupations to set out on the penitential journey to Compostela, a way at times long and arduous. It is the desire to reach Christ's light which they yearn for in the depths of their heart, although they are often not very good at expressing it in words.

At moments of confusion, of seeking, of difficulty, as well as the aspiration to strengthen their faith and live in a manner more consistent with it, pilgrims to Compostela embark on a profound process of conversion to Christ who took upon himself the weakness, the sin of humanity, the wretchedness of the world, taking them to where evil has no more power, where the light of goodness illuminates all things.

It is a people of silent walkers from every part of the world, who rediscover the ancient medieval and Christian tradition of the pilgrimage as they pass through small towns and cities steeped in Catholicism.

In that solemn Eucharist, experienced by so many of the faithful, present with intense participation and devotion, I asked fervently that all who go on pilgrimage to Santiago may receive the gift of becoming true witnesses of Christ, whom they have rediscovered at the crossroads of the evocative routes that lead to Compostela.

I also prayed that the pilgrims, following in the footsteps of many Saints down the ages who walked the "Way of Santiago", may continue to keep alive its genuine religious, spiritual and penitential significance, without giving in to banality, distractions or trends. This way, a grid of routes that run across vast regions forming a network throughout the Iberian Peninsular and Europe, was and continues to be a place of encounter for men and women of the most varied provenance, united in the search for faith and truth about themselves that inspires profound experiences of sharing, brotherhood and solidarity.

It is precisely faith in Christ that gives meaning to Compostela, a spiritually extraordinary place that continues to be a reference point for contemporary Europe in its new configurations and prospects.

To preserve and reinforce openness to the transcendent and likewise fruitful dialogue between faith and reason, between politics and religion, between economy and ethics, will make it possible to build a Europe which, faithful to its indispensable Christian roots, will fully respond to its own

vocation and mission in the world; therefore, certain of the immense possibilities of the European Continent and confident of its future of hope, I asked Europe to be ever more open to God, thereby encouraging the prospects of an authentic and respectful encounter in solidarity the peoples and civilizations of other continents.

Then, on Sunday, in Barcelona I had the truly great joy of presiding at the Dedication of the Church of the Sagrada Família which I declared a Minor Basilica. In contemplating the grandeur and beauty of this building that invites one to lift one's gaze and one's mind to the Highest, to God, I mentioned the great religious buildings such as the cathedrals of the Middle Ages which profoundly marked the history and the traits of Europe's principal cities. That splendid work — full of religious symbols, delicate in the interlacing of its forms, fascinating in its play of light and colour — as it were an immense sculpture in stone, the result of profound faith, of the spiritual sensitivity and artistic talent of Antoni Gaudí, derives from the true sanctuary, the place of real worship, Heaven itself, which Christ entered to appear before God on our behalf (cf. Heb 9:24).

In that magnificent church the brilliant architect was able to portray marvelously the mystery of the Church, in which the faithful become incorporated by Baptism into living stones for the building of a spiritual edifice (cf. 1 Pt 2:5). Gaudí conceived of and projected the Church of the Holy Family as a profound catechesis on Jesus Christ.

In Barcelona I also visited the “Nen Déu” Home, a charitable work started over 100 years ago, very closely connected with the Archdiocese. Here, children and young people with certain developmental challenges are cared for in a professional way and with love. Their lives are precious in God's eyes and are a constant invitation to us to emerge from our selfishness. In that home I shared in the joy and the deep and unconditional love of the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Hearts, the generous work of doctors, educators and of so many other professionals and volunteers who work in this Institution with praiseworthy dedication. I also blessed the first stone of a new Residence that will be part of this same institution, where everything speaks of charity, of respect for the person and his or her dignity and of deep joy, because human beings are valuable for what they are and not only for what they do.

While I was in Barcelona, I prayed intensely for families, the vital cells and hope of society and of the Church. I also remembered those who are suffering, especially in these times of serious financial difficulty. At the same time, I kept in mind the young people — who accompanied me throughout my Visits to Santiago and Barcelona with their enthusiasm and their joy — that they might discover the beauty, value and commitment of Marriage, in which a man and a woman form a family that is generously open to life and nurtures it from its conception until its natural end. Everything done to support marriage and the family, to help the neediest people, everything that increases the greatness of the human being and his inviolable dignity contributes to perfecting society. In this regard no effort is in vain.

Dear friends, I give thanks to God for the full days I spent in Santiago de Compostela and in Barcelona. I renew my thanks to the King and Queen of Spain, to the Prince and Princess of the Asturias and to all the Authorities.

I once again address my grateful and affectionate thoughts to my esteemed Brother Archbishops of those two Particular Churches and to their collaborators, as well as to all those who generously made every effort to ensure that my Visit to those two marvellous Cities was fruitful.

These were unforgettable days, which will remain impressed upon my heart! In particular, the two Eucharistic celebrations — carefully arranged and with the intense participation of all the faithful and with hymns taken both from the Church's great musical tradition and from the genius of modern composers — were moments of real inner joy.

May God reward everyone as he alone can; may the Most Holy Mother of God and the Apostle St James continue to guide and protect them on their way. Next year, please God, I shall go to Spain once again, for the World Youth Day in Madrid. From this moment I entrust to your prayers this provident project, so that it may be an opportunity for growth in the faith for a great number of young people.

To special groups

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from England, Denmark, Sweden, Japan and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I invoke Almighty God's Blessings of joy and peace.

My thoughts now turn to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*.

In yesterday's Liturgy we celebrated the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St John Lateran, "*caput et mater omnium ecclesiarum*". Along with this Anniversary let us also remember the churches in which your communities are gathered and those that are still waiting to be built in Rome and in the world. Dear young people, those suffering from illness and Christian spouses, I urge you to collaborate with the whole People of God and with all people of good will to construct the Home of the Lord.

May you always be "living stones" in the spiritual edifice that is the Church, journeying on together at the service of the Gospel, in offering up prayers and in sharing charity.

Greetings to the pilgrims in the Vatican Basilica

To Italian-speaking pilgrims:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to greet you and to address my warm welcome to each one of you. In particular I greet you, the faithful from Carpineto Romano who have gathered here with your Pastor, Bishop Lorenzo Loppa, to reciprocate the brief but full Visit which I had the joy to make to your region last September, on the occasion of the bicentenary of Pope Leo xiii's birth.

Dear friends, I would like to renew my cordial thanks to you all for the warm welcome you gave me on that occasion. I am thinking of the availability of the Civil Authorities, especially of the Mayor and the Municipal Council, as well as of the prompt commitment of your Bishop, the Parish Priest and their collaborators, especially in the preparation of the Eucharistic Celebration, so well organized and in which so many took part. May the memory of that event, charged with ecclesial and spiritual significance, revive in each and every one the wish to deepen their life of faith following the path of the teachings of your illustrious fellow-citizen, Pope Leo xiii, whose courageous pastoral action inspired a provident renewal of the commitment of Catholics to society.

To Czech-speaking pilgrims

I cordially greet you pilgrims from the Czech Republic who have gathered here, so numerous, to reciprocate the Visit I had the joy to make to your country last year. Dear friends, welcome! I cherish a dear and grateful memory of my pleasant Journey in your beautiful country. I am thinking in particular of the respectful courtesy of the various Authorities; of the courteous welcome I received from my venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, from the priests, the consecrated people and all the faithful who wanted to express their faith enthusiastically, gathered round the Successor of Peter.

I was also struck by the attentive consideration given to me even by those who although they are distant from the church are nevertheless seeking authentic human spiritual values of which the Catholic community itself wishes to be a joyful witness I ask the Lord to bring to fruition the graces of that journey and I express the hope that the Christian people of the Czech Republic may continue with a fresh impetus to bear a courageous Gospel witness everywhere. I impart to you all a special Apostolic Blessing which I also extend to your families and to your entire country.

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