



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Apostolic Journey to Munich, Altötting and Regensburg

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, I would like to think back to the various moments of the Pastoral Visit that the Lord granted me to make last week to Bavaria.

In sharing with you my emotions and sentiments on seeing the places dear to me, I feel first of all the need to thank God for having made possible my second Visit to Germany and my first to Bavaria, my native Land.

I am also deeply grateful to all those - Pastors, priests, pastoral workers, public Authorities, organizers, police forces and volunteers - who worked with dedication and patience to ensure that every event would take place as smoothly as possible. As I said on arriving at Munich Airport on Saturday, 9 September, the purpose of my Journey, in memory of those who helped to form my personality, was to reaffirm and strengthen, as Successor of the Apostle Peter, the close bonds that unite the See of Rome with the Church in Germany.

Thus, the Journey was not simply a "return" to the past but also a providential opportunity to look with hope to the future. "*Those who believe are never alone*": the motto of my Visit was intended as an invitation to reflect on the membership of every baptized person in the one Church of Christ, within which one is never alone but in constant communion with God and with all the brethren.

My first stop was the City of Munich, known as "the Metropolis with a heart" (*Weltstadt mit Herz*). In its historical centre is the *Marienplatz*, Mary's Square, in which the "*Mariensäule*", the Column of Our Lady, stands with a gilded bronze statue of the Virgin Mary on its summit.

I wanted to begin my stay in Bavaria with a [tribute to the Patroness of Bavaria](#), which, for me, assumes a highly significant value: there, in that square and before that image of Mary, about 30 years ago I was welcomed as Archbishop, and it was there that I began my episcopal mission with a prayer to Mary; there I returned at the end of my mandate before leaving for Rome. This time, I wanted to pause again at the foot of the *Mariensäule* to implore the intercession and blessing of the Mother of God, not only for the City of Munich and Bavaria, but for the entire Church and the whole world.

The next day, Sunday, [I celebrated the Eucharist on Neue Messe](#) (the New Tradefair) Esplanade in Munich, with the numerous faithful who had come from various places. Prompted by the Gospel of the day, I reminded everyone that when it comes to God, a "hardness of hearing" exists from which we are suffering especially today.

It is our task, as Christians in a secularized world, to proclaim and to witness to all the message of hope that faith offers us: in the Crucified Jesus, God, the merciful Father, calls us to be his children and to overcome every form of hatred and violence, to contribute to the definitive triumph of love.

God is near

"*Make us strong in faith*" was the theme of the Sunday afternoon Meeting with the First Holy Communion children and their young families, with the catechists, with the other pastoral workers and with all those who cooperate in the evangelization of the Diocese of Munich.

[We celebrated Vespers](#) together in the historical Cathedral, known as the "Cathedral of Our Lady" where the relics of St Benno, Patron of the City, are kept and where in 1977 I was ordained a Bishop.

I reminded the young people and the adults that God is not far from us, in some unreachable place of the universe; on the contrary, in Jesus he made himself close to us to establish with every one a relationship of friendship. Every Christian community, and the parish in particular, is called through the commitment of all its members to become one great family that can move ahead united on the path of true life.

Monday, 11 September, was largely occupied by the Visit to *Altötting* in the Diocese of *Passau*. This little town is known as "*Herz Bayerns*" (the heart of Bavaria), and there the "Black Madonna" is preserved, venerated in the *Gnadenkapelle* (Chapel of Graces), the destination of many pilgrims from Germany and the nations of Central Europe.

Close by is the Capuchin Friary of St Anne, the home where St Konrad Birndorfer lived, canonized by my venerable Predecessor, Pope Pius XI, in 1934.

With the multitude of the faithful taking part in [Holy Mass celebrated in the square outside the Shrine](#), we reflected together on Mary's role in the work of salvation, to learn from her helpful kindness, humility and generous acceptance of the divine will.

Mary leads us to Jesus: this truth was made even more visible at the end of the divine Sacrifice by the devout procession in which, carrying the statue of Our Lady of Grace, we made our way to the new Chapel of Eucharistic Adoration (*Anbetungskapelle*), inaugurated for the occasion. The day ended with [solemn Marian Vespers in the Basilica of St Anne, Altötting](#), attended by the Religious and seminarians of Bavaria as well as the Members of the Society for Spiritual Vocations.

The next day, Tuesday, in *Regensburg*, a Diocese established by St Boniface in 739 and whose Patron is Bishop St Wolfgang, there were three important appointments.

In the morning [Holy Mass was celebrated on Islinger Feld Esplanade](#), during which, taking up the theme of the Pastoral Visit: "*Those who believe are never alone*", we reflected on the content of the Creed. God, who is Father, wants through Jesus Christ to gather all humanity into a single family, the Church. For this reason the believer is never alone; those who believe must never be afraid of ending up in a blind alley.

Then in the afternoon I went to *Regensburg* Cathedral, also famous for its choir of treble voices, the "*Domspatzen*" (cathedral sparrows), which boasts 1,000 years of activity and for 30 years was conducted by my brother Georg. It was there that the [ecumenical celebration of Vespers](#) was held in which many representatives of various Churches and Ecclesial Communities in Bavaria took part, together with members of the Ecumenical Commission of the German Bishops' Conference.

This was a providential opportunity to pray together, to hasten full unity among all Christ's disciples and to reaffirm the duty to proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ, without attenuations, but in a clear and integral way and especially in our behaviour of sincere love.

On that day it was a particularly beautiful experience for me to deliver [a conference to a large audience of teachers and students at the University of Regensburg](#), where I taught as professor for many years.

With joy, I was able to meet once again the university world that was my spiritual homeland for a long period of my life. As a theme I had chosen the issue of the relationship between faith and reason.

To introduce my audience to the drama and timeliness of the topic, I cited some words from a 14th-century Christian-Islamic dialogue, with which the Christian interlocutor, the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus - in an incomprehensibly brusque way for us - presented to his Islamic interlocutor the problem of relations between religion and violence.

This citation, unfortunately, lent itself to misinterpretation. For the attentive reader of my text, however, it is clear that in no way did I want to make my own the negative words spoken by the Medieval Emperor in this dialogue, and that their polemical content does not express my personal conviction. My intention was quite different: starting with what Manuel II subsequently said in a positive manner, with very beautiful words, about rationality that must guide us in the transmission of faith, I wanted to explain that it is not religion and violence but rather religion and reason that go together.

The topic of my lecture - responding to the mission of the University - was therefore the relationship between faith and reason: I wished to invite [people] to the dialogue of the Christian faith with the modern world and to the dialogue of all the cultures and religions.

I hope that in the various circumstances during my Visit - for example, when in Munich I emphasized how important it is to respect what is sacred to others - that my deep respect for the great religions, and especially for Muslims, who "worship God, who is one" and with whom we are engaged in preserving and promoting together, for the benefit of all men, "peace, liberty, social justice and moral values" (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 3), appeared quite clear.

Therefore, I trust that after the immediate reactions, my words at the University of *Regensburg* will serve as an incentive and an encouragement for a positive, even self-critical dialogue, both between religions and between modern reason and the Christian faith.

The following morning, Wednesday, 13 September, in the "*Alte Kapelle*" (Old Chapel) of *Regensburg*, in which a miraculous image of Mary is preserved, painted, according to local tradition, by the Evangelist Luke, I presided at a short Liturgy for the Blessing of the new organ.

Inspired by the structure of this musical instrument that consists of many pipes of various sizes but that all harmonize well with one another, I reminded those present of the need for the various ministries, gifts and charisms active in the Ecclesial Community to converge under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to form one harmony in the praise of God and in fraternal love.

On Thursday, 14 September, my last stop was the City of *Freising*. I feel a special bond with it because I was ordained a priest precisely in its Cathedral, dedicated to Mary Most Holy and to St Corbinian, the evangelizer of Bavaria.

And the last Meeting planned, with priests and with permanent deacons, took place in the

Cathedral itself. Reliving the emotion of my priestly Ordination, I reminded those present of the duty to collaborate with the Lord in inspiring new vocations at the service of the "harvest" which is "plentiful" even today, and I urged them to cultivate the interior life as a pastoral priority in order not to lose contact with Christ, the source of joy in the daily fatigue of the ministry.

At the Farewell Ceremony, once again thanking all those who contributed to the realization of the Visit, I stressed once more its main purpose: to present anew to my fellow citizens the eternal truth of the Gospel, and to strengthen believers in their adherence to Christ, the Incarnate Son of God who died and rose for us.

May Mary, Mother of the Church, help us to open our hearts and minds to the One who is "the Way, and the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14: 6).

I prayed for this and for this I invite all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to continue to pray, as I warmly thank you for the affection with which you have accompanied me in my daily pastoral ministry.

My thanks to you all.

To special groups

I warmly welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims present today. In particular, I greet the members of the Society of Missionaries of Africa and the pilgrims from Samoa. Upon you all, I invoke God's abundant Blessings.

Lastly, my thoughts go with special affection to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. May friendship with Jesus, dear *young people*, be a source of joy and a support in making demanding decisions; may it be a comfort to you, dear *sick people*, in difficult times, and may it bring you both physical and mental relief. Dear *newly-weds*, stay constantly united to Christ to fulfil faithfully your vocation to reciprocal love.

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