



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 30 September 2009

[\[Video\]](#)

Apostolic Visit to the Czech Republic

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In accordance with the custom after international Apostolic Journeys, I take the opportunity of today's General Audience to speak of the [pilgrimage I made a few days ago to the Czech Republic](#). I do so first of all as an act of thanksgiving to God who granted me to make this Visit and abundantly blessed it. It was a real pilgrimage and, at the same time, a mission to the heart of Europe: a pilgrimage, because for more than a millennium Bohemia and Moravia have been lands of faith and holiness; and a mission, because Europe needs to rediscover in God and in his love its firm foundation of hope. It is not by chance that the holy evangelizers of those peoples, Cyril and Methodius, are Patrons of Europe together with St Benedict. "The love of Christ is our strength": this was the motto of the Journey, an affirmation which re-echoes the faith of so many heroic witnesses of the remote and recent past I am thinking in particular of the last century but which, above all, aims to interpret the certainty of Christians today. Yes, our strength is the love of Christ! It is a strength that inspires and gives life to true revolutions, peaceful and liberating, and that sustains us in moments of crisis, permitting us to straighten up when freedom, recovered with great effort, risks losing itself, its own truth.

I met with a [warm welcome](#). The President of the Republic, to whom I renew the expression of my gratitude, wanted to be present at various events and received me, together with my collaborators,

with great cordiality at his residence, the capital's historic Castle. The entire Bishops' Conference, and in particular the Cardinal Archbishop of Prague and the Bishop of Brno, made me feel with great warmth the deep bond that binds the Czech Catholic community to the Successor of St Peter. I thank them too for having carefully prepared the liturgical celebrations. I am also grateful to all the civil and military Authorities and to all those who in various ways contributed to the success of my Visit.

The love of Christ first revealed itself in the face of a Child. In fact, on my arrival in Prague I made my first stop at the Church of Our Lady of Victory where the Infant Jesus, known precisely as the "Infant of Prague", is venerated. This image refers to the mystery of God made man, to the "close God", the foundation of our hope. Before the "Infant of Prague", I prayed for all children, for parents and for the future of the family. The true "victory" for which we ask Mary today is the victory of love and life in the family and in society!

Prague Castle, extraordinary from the historical and architectural viewpoints, suggests a further, more general reflection: its vast layout includes many monuments, scenes and institutions, almost as if it represented a *polis* in which the Cathedral and Palace, square and park, harmoniously coexist. Thus, in this same context, my Visit touched on the civil and the religious environments that are not in opposition but in harmony, while retaining their distinctiveness. Thus, addressing the Political and Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps I chose to recall the indissoluble bond that must always exist between freedom and truth. One must not fear truth, because it is a friend of man and of his freedom; indeed, only in the sincere search for the true, the good and the beautiful is it really possible to offer a future to today's youth and to the generations to come. Moreover, what is it that attracts so many people to Prague if not its beauty, a beauty that is not only aesthetic but also historical and religious in the broadest human sense? Those who exercise responsibility in the political and educational fields must be able to find light in that truth which is a reflection of the Creator's eternal Wisdom; and they are personally called to bear witness to it with their lives. Only a serious commitment of intellectual and moral rectitude is worthy of the sacrifice of all those who paid the price of freedom so dearly!

A symbol of this synthesis between truth and beauty is Prague's splendid Cathedral, called after Sts Vitus, Wenceslaus and Adalbert, where the celebration of Vespers was held with the priests, religious, seminarians and lay representatives of the associations and ecclesial movements. For the Central and Eastern European communities it is a difficult period: in addition to the consequences of the long winter of atheistic totalitarianism are the harmful effects of a certain Western secularism and consumerism. I therefore encouraged all to draw ever new energy from the Risen Lord, to be able to be a Gospel leaven in society and to involve themselves, as is already happening, in charitable activities and, especially, in the educational and scholastic fields.

I extended this message of hope founded on faith in Christ to the entire People of God during two great Eucharistic Celebrations that took place respectively in Brno, the capital of Moravia, and in

Stará Boleslav, the place where St Wenceslaus, the nation's principal Patron, was martyred. Moravia immediately calls to mind Sts Cyril and Methodius, the evangelizers of the Slav peoples, and hence the inexorable power of the Gospel, flowing through history and the continents, carrying life everywhere, like a river of healing waters. Christ's words: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11: 28) are engraved above the portal of the Cathedral of Brno. These very words rang out last Sunday in the liturgy, re-echoing the perennial voice of the Saviour, hope of the peoples, yesterday, today and forever. An eloquent sign of Christ's lordship and of his mercy is the existence of the holy Patrons of the different Christian nations, such as, precisely, Wenceslaus, a young king of Bohemia in the 10th century who was distinguished for his exemplary Christian witness and was assassinated by his brother. Wenceslaus put the Kingdom of Heaven before the fascination of earthly power and has lived on for ever in the heart of the Czech people as an example and protector in the alternating vicissitudes of history. To the numerous young people present at the Mass for St Wenceslaus, who also came from neighbouring countries, I extended the invitation to recognize Christ as the truest friend who satisfies the deepest aspirations of the human heart.

Lastly, among others, I must mention two meetings: the ecumenical gathering and the encounter with the academic community. The former, held in the Archbishop's Residence in Prague, gathered the representatives of the various Christian communities in the Czech Republic and the leader of the Jewish Community. In thinking of the history of this country, which unfortunately experienced harsh conflicts among Christians, it was a cause of deep gratitude to God to be meeting together as disciples of the one Lord to share the joy of faith and historical responsibility in the face of today's challenges. The effort to progress towards an ever fuller and more visible unity amongst us, believers in Christ, makes our common commitment to rediscovering the Christian roots of Europe stronger and more effective. The latter aspect, which my beloved Predecessor John Paul II had very much at heart, also emerged at the Meeting with university rectors and representatives of the teaching body and of the students, as well as with other important figures of the cultural world. In this context I wanted to insist upon the role of the university institution, one of the fundamental structures of Europe, of which Prague Athenaeum is one of the oldest and most prestigious on the continent: Charles University, called after the Emperor Charles IV who founded it, together with Pope Clement VI. The university is a vital environment for society, a guarantee of freedom and development, as is shown by the fact that the so-called "Velvet Revolution" came into being precisely in university circles. Twenty years after that historic event, I proposed the idea anew of an integral human formation rooted in truth, to oppose a new dictatorship, that of relativism combined with the domination of technology. The humanistic and scientific cultures cannot be separated; on the contrary, they are the two sides of the same coin: we are once again reminded of this by the Czech Republic, the homeland of great writers such as Kafka and of the Abbot Mendel, a pioneer of modern genetics.

Dear friends, I thank the Lord because with this Visit he has granted me to meet a people and a Church with profoundly historical and religious roots and which this year is commemorating

various events of lofty spiritual and social value. I renew a message of hope to my brothers and sisters in the Czech Republic and an invitation to have the courage of goodness in order to build the present and future of Europe. I entrust the fruits of my Pastoral Visit to the intercession of Mary Most Holy and of all the Saints of Bohemia and Moravia. Thank you.

To special groups

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, including groups from Britain and Ireland, Scandinavia, Indonesia and the United States of America. I greet especially the School Sisters of St Francis and the new students from the English and Irish Colleges. May the time you spend in Rome deepen your faith and bring you closer to Christ. God bless all of you, and your loved ones at home.

Lastly I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear *young people*, listen to Christ, the word of truth, and be ready to accept his plan for your life. Dear *sick people*, feel Jesus beside you and witness with your trust to the life-giving power of the Cross. Dear *newlyweds*, with the grace of the Sacrament that you have recently received, day after day reinforce your love and walk on the path of holiness.

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