



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO COLOGNE ON THE OCCASION OF THE XX WORLD YOUTH DAY

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

*Cologne Airport
Thursday, 18 August 2005*

*Mr President of the Republic,
Distinguished Political and Civil Authorities,
Your Eminences and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Citizens of the Federal Republic,
My Dear Young People,*

Today, with deep joy I find myself for the first time after my election to the Chair of Peter in my beloved Homeland, in Germany. I can only repeat what I stated at an interview with Vatican Radio. I consider it a loving gesture of providence since, quite unintentionally, my first Visit outside of Italy should be to my Homeland: Here in Cologne, at a moment, in a place and on an occasion when the young people of all the world are meeting, from all the continents, in which the frontiers between the continents, cultures, races, nations disappear, in order that we may all be one thanks to the star that has shone for us: the star of faith in Jesus Christ, which unites us and shows us the way so that we can all be a great force for peace beyond all frontiers and all divisions.

I thank God for this with deep emotion, that he has enabled me to begin here in my Country and on such a propitious occasion for peace.

Therefore, as you have said, Mr President, I have come to Cologne in very deep continuity with my great and beloved Predecessor John Paul II, who had this intuition - I should say this

inspiration - of the World Youth Days, in this way creating not a single event of exceptional religious and ecclesial meaning, but also human, which takes people beyond the borderlines between one and the other and contributes to building a common future.

I am sincerely grateful to all present for the warm welcome given to me. My respectful greeting goes first to the President of the Federal Republic, Mr Horst Köhler, whom I thank for the gracious words of welcome which he addressed to me with all his heart. I did not know an economist could also be a philosopher and a theologian! My heartfelt thanks.

I also express my respectful and grateful thought to the Representatives of the Government, the Members of the Diplomatic Corps and the civil and military Authorities, the Federal Chancellor, the President of Nordrhein-Westfalen, all the Authorities present here.

With fraternal affection I greet the Pastor of the Archdiocese of Cologne, Cardinal Joachim Meisner. My greeting also goes to the other Bishops, with the President of the German Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Lehmann, the priests, men and women religious, and to all those engaged in various pastoral activities in the German-speaking Dioceses.

At this moment I also wish to greet with affection all those living in the different *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In these days of intense preparation for World Youth Day, the Dioceses of Germany, and the Diocese and City of Cologne in particular, have been enlivened by the presence of very many young people from different parts of the world. I thank all those who have so competently and generously helped to organize this worldwide ecclesial event.

I am grateful to the parishes, religious institutes, associations, civil organizations and private citizens who have thoughtfully offered hospitality and so friendly a welcome to the thousands of pilgrims coming here from different continents. It is a fine thing that on such occasions the virtue of hospitality, which has almost disappeared and is one of man's original virtues, should be renewed and enable people of all states of life to meet.

The Church in Germany and the People of the German Federal Republic can be proud of their long tradition of openness to the global community; among other things, this is seen in their many initiatives of solidarity, particularly on behalf of developing countries.

In this spirit of esteem and acceptance towards all those who come from different cultures and traditions, we are about to experience [World Youth Day in Cologne](#). That so many young people have come to meet the Successor of Peter is a sign of the Church's vitality. I am happy to be with them, to confirm their faith and, God willing, to enliven their hope.

At the same time, I am sure that I will also receive something from the young people, the fact that their enthusiasm, their sensitivity and their readiness will sustain me and give me the courage to continue my journey in the service of the Church as the Successor of Peter and to face the challenges of the future.

To all of you present here, and all those who have welcomed people from other parts of the world in these event-filled days, I now express my most cordial greeting.

In addition to intense moments of prayer, reflection and celebration with them and with all those taking part in the various scheduled events, I will have an opportunity to meet the Bishops, to whom even now I extend my fraternal greeting. I will also meet the representatives of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I shall be honoured to make a Visit to the Synagogue, which I have very much at heart, for a meeting with the Jewish community, and also to welcome the representatives of some Islamic communities.

These meetings are important steps to intensify the journey of dialogue and cooperation in our shared commitment to building a more just and fraternal future, a future which is truly more human. We all know how necessary it is to seek this path, how much we need this dialogue and this cooperation.

During this [World Youth Day](#) we will reflect together on the theme: "*We have come to worship him*" (Mt 2: 2). This is a precious opportunity for thinking more deeply about the meaning of human life as a "pilgrimage", a journey guided by a "star", in search of the Lord.

Together we shall consider the Magi, who would never have thought to become pilgrims even after death, nor that one day their relics would be carried in pilgrimage to Cologne. We shall look to these personages who, coming from different lands, were among the first to recognize the promised Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Virgin Mary, and to bow down in worship before him (cf. Mt 2: 1-12).

The Ecclesial Community and the city of Cologne have a special link with these emblematic figures. Like the Magi, all believers - and young people in particular - have been called to set out on the journey of life in search of truth, justice and love. We must seek this star, we must follow it. The ultimate goal of the journey can only be found through an encounter with Christ, an encounter which cannot take place without faith.

Along this interior journey we can be guided by the many signs with which a long and rich Christian tradition has indelibly marked this Land of Germany: from great historical monuments to countless works of art found throughout the Country, from documents preserved in libraries to lively popular traditions, from philosophical inquiry to the theological reflection of her many great thinkers, from the spiritual traditions to the mystical experience of a vast array of saints.

Here we find a very rich cultural and spiritual heritage which even today, in the heart of Europe, testifies to the fruitfulness of the Christian faith and tradition which we must rekindle, because it has within it new strength for the future.

The Diocese and the region of Cologne, in particular, keep the living memory of great witnesses who, as it were, are present in the pilgrimage begun by the three Magi. I think of St Boniface, St Ursula, St Albert the Great, and, in more recent times, St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) and Bl. Adolph Kolping.

These, our illustrious brothers and sisters in the faith, who down the centuries have held high the torch of holiness, have become people who have seen the star and have shown it to others. May these figures be "models" and "patrons" of this meeting of ours, of the World Youth Day.

While to all of you here present I renew my deep gratitude for your gracious welcome, I pray to the Lord for the future of the Church and of society as a whole in this Federal Republic of Germany, so dear to me. May this Country's long history and her great social, economic and cultural attainments be an incentive to renewed commitment on your journey at a time when new problems and issues are also facing the other peoples of the Continent.

May the Virgin Mary, who presented the Child Jesus to the Magi when they arrived in Bethlehem to worship the Saviour, continue to intercede for us, just as for centuries she has kept watch over the German People from her many shrines throughout the German *Länder*.

May the Lord bless everyone here present, together with all the pilgrims and all who live in this Land.

May God protect the Federal Republic of Germany!

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