



More Than 1 Million Pilgrims Greet Pope Benedict XVI for Sunday Mass in Germany

By MATT MOORE
The Associated Press

Aug. 21, 2005 - More than 1 million Roman Catholic young people who had camped out overnight in an enormous field welcomed Benedict XVI on Sunday for the concluding Mass of his four-day trip to Germany, his first foreign travel as pope.

As he began his homily, calling on the pilgrims and visitors on World Youth Day to make wise use of the freedom God had given them, the sun broke through the thick, gray clouds.

"Freedom is not simply about enjoying life in total autonomy, but rather about living by the measure of truth and goodness so that we ourselves can become true and good," he said.

He said there is a "strange forgetfulness of God," while at same time the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction has led to a "new explosion of religion."

"I have no wish to discredit all the manifestations of this phenomenon. There may be sincere joy in the discovery," he said. "Yet, if it is pushed too far, religion becomes almost a consumer product. People choose what they like, and some are even able to make a profit from it."

"But religion constructed on a 'do-it-yourself' basis cannot ultimately help us. Help people to discover the true star which points out the way to us: Jesus Christ."

He urged the youth to take the time to regularly attend Sunday Mass.

"If you make the effort, you will realize that this is what gives a proper focus to your free time," he said.

The crowds listened intently as he spoke in German, English, Italian and French.

As Benedict was driven to the altar overlooking the Marienfeld, or Mary's Field, in his tall, glassed-in popemobile, the sound of hymns played as thousands of priests lined up to assist in the service.

Pilgrims cheered the 78-year-old German pope as he walked to the main altar, wearing a gold miter and waving to the crowd. He smiled as he ascended the raised altar platform and began the service.

Cardinal Joachim Meisner, the archbishop of Cologne, welcomed Benedict, who was making his first trip back to his homeland since becoming pope in April. He paid tribute to the young people in attendance, who he said numbers more than 1 million.

"Here in the midst of the youth of the world, and countless priests, bishops and cardinals, we would like to welcome you to Marienfeld," Meisner said. "You belong to the youth, and the youth belongs to you."

Then, in a nod to the global reach of World Youth Day, the Gloria section was accompanied by the playing of South American zamponas and charangos, followed by an Indian sitar, African drums, and an Australian didgeridoo.

During his four-day visit to his homeland, Benedict has made a point of stressing the importance of cross-faith cooperation.

After meeting with Jewish leaders at a synagogue on Friday, he joined Muslim leaders on Saturday, urging them to join with Christians in trying to combat the spread of terrorism worldwide.

He said Muslim leaders had a "great responsibility" in properly educating their younger generations.

"I am certain that I echo your own thoughts when I bring up as one of our concerns the spread of terrorism," Benedict said.

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