



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 28 September 2011

[\[Video\]](#)

Apostolic Journey to Germany

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As you know, from Thursday to Sunday last I made a Pastoral Visit to Germany; I am therefore glad, as usual, to take the opportunity of today's Audience to review with you the marvellous full days I spent in my homeland. I travelled through Germany from north to south, from east to west: from the capital Berlin to Erfurt and Eichsfeld and, lastly, to the city of Freiburg, not far from the boundaries with France and Switzerland.

I thank the Lord first of all for giving me the possibility to meet with the people and to speak about God, to pray together and to strengthen my brothers and sisters in the faith, complying with the special mandate that the Lord entrusted to Peter and to his Successors. This Visit, which took place under the motto: "Where God is, there is a future", was truly a great celebration of faith in the various meetings and conversations, in the ceremonies, especially in the solemn Masses with the People of God. These moments were a precious gift which enabled us to perceive anew that it is God who gives our life the most profound meaning, true fullness, and indeed that he alone gives a future to us, one and all.

With profound gratitude I recall the warm and enthusiastic welcome as well as the attention and affection I was shown in the various places I visited. I cordially thank the German Bishops,

especially those of the dioceses which offered me hospitality, for their invitation and for all they did, together with so many collaborators, to prepare this Journey. My heartfelt thanks go likewise to the Federal President and to all the political and civil authorities, at the federal and regional levels. I am deeply grateful to all who contributed in various ways to the success of the Visit, and especially to the many volunteers. Thus it was a great gift for me and for all of us and awakened joy, hope, and a new impulse of faith and commitment for the future.

In Berlin, the capital, the Federal President welcomed me at his residence and greeted me in his name and in the name of my compatriot, expressing the esteem and affection for a Pope from Germany. I outlined a brief thought on the reciprocal relationship between religion and freedom, remembering a sentence of the great bishop and social reformer: Wilhelm von Ketteler: “Just as religion has need of freedom, so also freedom has need of religion”.

I very willingly accepted the invitation to go to the Bundestag, which was certainly one of the most important events on my itinerary. For the first time ever a Pope addressed members of the German Parliament. On this occasion I wanted to explain the foundations of law and of the free state of law, that is, the measure of every law inscribed by the Creator in the very being of his creation. Hence it is necessary to broaden our conception of nature, understanding it not only as a collection of functions but beyond this as the language of the Creator to help us to distinguish between good and evil. I then had a meeting with some representatives of Germany's Jewish community. Recalling our common roots in faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we highlighted the results obtained so far in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and Judaism in Germany. I was likewise able to meet several members of the Muslim community, and to agree with them on the importance of religious freedom for humanity's peaceful development.

Holy Mass in the Olympic Stadium in Berlin at the end of the first day of my Visit was one of the important liturgical celebrations that enabled me to pray together with the faithful and to encourage them in their faith. I was glad to see the participation of so many people! At that festive and impressive moment we meditated on the Gospel image of the vine and the branches, namely on the importance — for our personal life as believers and for our being Church, his mystical Body — of being united to Christ.

The second stop on my Visit was Thuringia. Germany, and Thuringia in particular, is the land of the Protestant Reformation. From the very outset, therefore, I ardently desired to give special importance to ecumenism in the framework of this Journey; I firmly hoped for an ecumenical experience in Erfurt, for it was in this very city that Martin Luther entered the Augustinian community and was ordained a priest. I was therefore deeply cheered by the meeting with the members of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany and by the ecumenical event in the former Augustinian Convent. It was a cordial meeting which, in dialogue and prayer, brought us more deeply to Christ. We saw once again how important our common witness to faith in Jesus Christ is in today's world, which all too often takes no notice of God or is not interested in him. Our

common effort on the way towards full unity is essential, but let us always be well aware that we ourselves can “make” neither faith nor the unity we so deeply long for. A faith created by ourselves has no value, and true unity is indeed a gift of the Lord, who always prayed and still prays for the unity of his disciples. Christ alone can bestow this unity upon us and we will be ever more united to the extent that we turn to him and let ourselves be transformed by him.

A particularly emotional moment for me was the celebration of Marian Vespers outside the Shrine of Etzelsbach, where I was welcomed by a multitude of pilgrims. As a young man I had heard about the Eichsfeld region — a strip of land that had always remained Catholic throughout the various ups and downs of history — and of its inhabitants who courageously withstood the dictatorships of Nazism and Communism. So I was very pleased to be visiting Eichsfeld and its people on a pilgrimage to the miraculous image of Our Lady of Sorrows of Etzelsbach, where for centuries the faithful have entrusted to Mary their petitions, preoccupations and sufferings, receiving comfort, graces and blessings. Equally moving was the [Mass celebrated in Erfurt's magnificent cathedral square](#).

In recalling the Patron Saints of Thuringia — St Elizabeth, St Boniface and St Kilian — and the luminous example of the faithful who witnessed to the Gospel during the totalitarian regimes, I invited the faithful to be the saints of today, credible witnesses of Christ, and to contribute to building our society. In fact it has always been the Saints and people permeated by love for Christ to have truly transformed the world. My brief meeting with Mons. Hermann Scheipers, the last living German priest to have survived the concentration camp of Dachau, was deeply moving. In Erfurt, in addition, I had the opportunity to meet several victims of sex abuse perpetrated by religious. I wanted to assure these victims of my regret and of my closeness in their suffering.

The last stage of the Journey took me to south-west Germany, to the Archdiocese of Freiburg. The inhabitants of this beautiful city, the archdiocesan faithful and the many pilgrims from neighbouring Switzerland and France and from other countries gave me an especially festive welcome. I also felt this at the prayer vigil with thousands of young people. I was glad to see that faith in my German homeland has a youthful face, that it is vibrant and has a future. In the evocative Rite of Light I passed on to the young people the flame of the Paschal candle, a symbol of the light which is Christ, urging them: “You are the light of the world”. I repeated to them that the Pope trusts in the active collaboration of the young; with Christ's grace, they are able to bring the flame of God's love to the world.

Then the meeting with [the seminarians at the Seminary of Freiburg](#) was unique. In a certain sense as a response to the touching letter they had sent me a few weeks earlier, I wanted to show these young men the beauty and greatness of their call from the Lord and to offer them some help so that they might continue on the path of the “sequela” with joy and in deep communion with Christ. Again at the seminary I was also able to meet in a brotherly atmosphere several [representatives of the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches](#), to whom we Catholics feel very close. And the

common duty to be a leaven for the renewal of our society stems from this broad communion itself. A friendly meeting with representatives of the German Catholic laity concluded the series of events at the seminary.

The great celebration of the Sunday Eucharist at the tourist Airport of Freiburg was another highpoint of my Pastoral Visit and the opportunity to thank all those who are working hard in the various spheres of ecclesial life, especially the numerous volunteers and those who collaborate in charitable projects. It is they who make possible the many forms of assistance that the German Church offers to the universal Church, especially in mission lands. I also mentioned that their invaluable service will always be fruitful when it derives from an authentic and living faith, in union with the Bishops and the Pope, in union with the Church. Lastly, before returning, I spoke to about 1,000 Catholics committed to the Church and to society, suggesting some ideas for the Church's action in a secularized society, urging them to be free from material and political commitments in order to be more transparent to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, this Apostolic Journey in Germany gave me a favourable opportunity to meet the faithful of my homeland, Germany, to strengthen them in faith, hope and love, and to share with them the joy of being Catholic. Yet my Message was addressed to the entire German nation, to invite them all to look with trust to the future. It is true, "Where God is, there is a future". I thank once again all those who made this Visit possible and all who have accompanied me with their prayers. May the Lord bless the People of God in Germany, and may he bless you all. Many thanks.

To special groups:

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from England, Norway, Sweden, Kenya, South Africa, Samoa, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea and the United States of America. My affectionate greeting goes to the students of both the Venerable English College and the Pontifical Irish College as they take up their studies for the priesthood. I also greet the ecumenical groups from the Nordic countries and the pilgrims from Samoa. I thank the choirs, including the children's choir from South Korea, for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you I invoke Almighty God's blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. I ask them all to be ever faithful to the Gospel ideal in order to put it into practice in daily life, thereby experiencing the joy of Christ's presence.

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