



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 4 April 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Apostolic Journey to Mexico and to the Republic of Cuba

Easter Triduum

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I still feel the strong emotion my recent [Apostolic Visit to Mexico and Cuba](#) aroused in me, which I would like to recall today. Gratitude to the Lord rises spontaneously from my soul: in his Providence, he allowed me to travel for the first time as Successor of Peter to these two countries, which preserve an indelible memory of [Bl. John Paul II's visits](#). The bicentennial of the Independence of Mexico and of other Latin American countries, the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the Holy See and the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the image of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre in the Republic of Cuba were the occasion for my pilgrimage. With it in spirit, I wished to embrace the entire continent, inviting everyone to live together in hope and the concrete engagement to walk united towards a better future. I am grateful to the Presidents of Mexico and Cuba, who courteously welcomed me, as well as to the other Authorities. I wholeheartedly thank the Archbishops of León, Santiago de Cuba and Havana and the other venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, who welcomed me with great affection, as well as their collaborators and everyone who worked so generously for my Pastoral Visit. They were unforgettable days of joy and hope, which will remain impressed in my heart!

The first stop was León, in the State of Guanajuato, the geographical centre of Mexico. There, a

large, festive crowd offered me an extraordinary and lively reception, as a sign of the warm embrace of an entire people. Starting from the [welcome ceremony](#), I was able to recognize the faith and the warmth of the priests, the consecrated people and the lay faithful. In the presence of the leaders of various institutions, of numerous Bishops and of the representatives of society, I recalled the necessity of recognizing and protecting the fundamental rights of the human person — among which religious freedom stands out — assuring my closeness to everyone suffering because of social wounds, old and new conflicts, corruption and violence. I recall with profound gratitude the countless people lining the streets, who accompanied me with enthusiasm. In those hands extended in a sign of greeting and affection, in those happy faces, in those cries of joy I saw the tenacious hope of Mexican Christians, a hope which has remained alight in their hearts despite the difficult moments of violence, which I did not fail to deplore and to whose victims I turned a heart-felt thought, being able to comfort some in person. On that same day [I encountered a great number of children and adolescents](#), who are the future of the nation and of the Church. Their inexhaustible exuberance expressed in resounding song and music, as well as their looks and gestures, were evidence of the strong desire of all the children of Mexico, Latin America and the Caribbean to be able to live in peace, in serenity and harmony, in a more just and reconciled society.

The disciples of the Lord should strive to increase the joy of being Christian and the joy of belonging to the Church. The energy to serve Christ in situations that are difficult and painful is born from this joy. I recalled this truth to the enormous crowd assembled for the [Sunday Eucharistic celebration in the Bicentennial Park in León](#). I exhorted all to trust in the goodness of Almighty God who can change unbearable and dark situations from within, from the heart. The Mexicans responded with their ardent faith and with their convinced adherence to the Gospel I recognized yet again comforting signs of hope for the continent. The last event of my Visit in Mexico, still in León, was the [celebration of Vespers in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Light](#), with the Mexican Bishops and the representatives of the Episcopates of America. I expressed my closeness to their commitment in the face of various challenges and difficulties, and my gratitude to those who spread the Gospel in complex situations, often not without restrictions. I encouraged them to be zealous Pastors and reliable guides, inspiring everywhere sincere communion and cordial adherence to the Church's teaching. I then left the beloved country of Mexico where I experienced a special devotion and affection for the Vicar of Christ. [Before leaving](#), I urged the Mexican people to remain faithful to the Lord and to his Church, firmly anchored to their own Christian roots.

On the following day, the second part of my Apostolic Visit began with my arrival in Cuba, where I went above all in order to support the mission of the Catholic Church, engaged in proclaiming the Gospel with joy, despite the lack of means and the difficulties yet to be overcome, so that religion may carry out its proper spiritual and educational service in the public sector of society. I wished to underline this [by going to Santiago de Cuba](#), the second city of the Island, without failing to highlight the good relations which exist between the State and the Holy See, with the aim of

servicing the lively and constructive presence of the local Church. I also assured them that the Pope carries in his heart the preoccupations and the aspirations of all Cubans, especially those who suffer through the restriction of freedom.

The first Holy Mass which I had the joy of celebrating on Cuban soil took place in the context of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the image of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, Patroness of Cuba. It was an intensely strong spiritual moment, with the attentive and prayerful participation of thousands of people, the sign of a Church which is emerging from situations which were not easy, but with a lively witness to charity and to an active presence in the life of the people. I invited the Cuban Catholics, together with the entire population, who hope for a better future, to give new vigour to their faith and to contribute with the courage of forgiveness and understanding to the construction of an open and renewed society, where there is ever more space for God, because, when God is left out, the world turns into an inhospitable place for man. Before leaving Santiago de Cuba I went to the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, so dear to the Cuban people. The pilgrimage of the image of Our Lady of Charity excited great spiritual enthusiasm in the families of the Island, making it a significant event of new evangelization and an opportunity for rediscovering the faith. To the Holy Virgin I commended, above all, young Cubans and those who are suffering.

The second stop in Cuba was Havana, capital of the Island. Young people, in particular, were the principal protagonists of the exuberant welcome on my way to the Nunciature, where I had the opportunity to converse with the Bishops of the Country to discuss the challenges which the Cuban Church is called to face, in the awareness that the people are looking to her with growing trust. The following day I presided at Holy Mass in the principal square of Havana, packed with people. I reminded everyone that Cuba and the world need change, but change will only come if each person opens to the entire truth about man, an indispensable presupposition for reaching freedom, and is ready to sow reconciliation and brotherhood around him/ herself, basing his or her own life on Jesus Christ. He alone can disperse the shadows of error, helping us to defeat evil and everything which oppresses us. I wished also to repeat that the Church does not ask for privileges, but for the right to proclaim and celebrate the faith also in public, carrying the Gospel message of hope and peace to every area of society. In expressing my appreciation for the steps already completed in this direction by the Cuban Authorities, I underlined that it is necessary to continue along this path to reach full religious freedom.

Upon leaving Cuba, tens of thousands of Cubans lined the street to wish me goodbye, despite the heavy rain. At the departure ceremony I recalled that at the present time the various members of Cuban society are called to make a sincere effort to cooperate and dialogue patient for the good of the country. In this perspective, my presence on the Island, as a witness of Jesus Christ, intended to encourage people to open the gates of their heart to him, who is the source of hope and strength, to increase goodness. For this reason I said goodbye to the Cubans, exhorting them to rekindle the faith of their fathers and to build a better future.

This [Visit to Mexico and to Cuba](#) has had, thanks be to God, the desired pastoral success. May the Mexican and Cuban peoples draw from it abundant fruits to build a future of peace and of fraternity in ecclesial communion and evangelical courage.

Dear friends, tomorrow afternoon, with the Holy Mass in *Coena Domini*, [we will enter the Easter Triduum](#), summit of the entire Liturgical Year, to celebrate the central Mystery of the faith: the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. In the Gospel of St John, this culminating moment of Jesus' mission is called his "hour", which begins with the Last Supper. The Evangelist introduces it in this way: "Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). Jesus' whole life had been directed to this hour, characterized by two aspects which illuminate one another: it is the hour of the "passage" (*metabasis*) and it is the hour of the "love (*agape*) to the end". In fact, it is precisely the divine love, the Spirit with which Jesus is overflowing, which makes Jesus to "pass" through the abyss of evil and death and makes him emerge into the new "space" of the resurrection. It is *agape*, love, which effects this transformation, so that Jesus passes beyond the limits of the human condition marked by sin and surpasses the barrier which keeps man prisoner, separated from God and from eternal life. Participating with faith in the liturgical celebrations of the Paschal Triduum, we are invited to live this transformation realized by *agape*. Each of us has been loved by Jesus "to the end", that is, to the complete gift of himself on the Cross, when he cried: "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30). Let us allow ourselves to be touched by this love, let us allow ourselves to be transformed, so that the resurrection may truly take place in us. I invite you, therefore, to live the Paschal Triduum intensely and I wish you all a Holy Easter! Thank you.

APPEAL

Today is the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, I express my closeness to the victims of mines and to their families. I encourage all those who are committed to freeing humanity from these terrible and devious weapons, which, as Blessed John Paul ii said when the Convention banning them came into effect, prevent people from walking "together on the paths of life without fearing the threat of destruction and death" ([Angelus](#), 28 February 1999).

To special groups:

I offer a cordial welcome to all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including the student groups from England, Ireland and the United States of America. I also greet the participants in the International Gathering of University Students. May your pilgrimage to Rome bear spiritual fruit in a deeper love of Christ and his Church. Upon you and your families I invoke the Lord's blessings of wisdom, joy and peace. A happy and blessed Easter to all of you!

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Lastly, my thoughts cordially turn to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. May the contemplation of the passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus, dear *young people*, make you ever more steadfast in your Christian witness. And, dear *sick people*, from Christ's Cross may you draw daily support in overcoming periods of trial and discouragement. May you, dear *newlyweds*, draw from this Paschal Mystery, which we contemplate during these days, encouragement to make your families a place of faithful and fruitful love.

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