



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO AUSTRIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 850th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE SHRINE OF MARIAZELL

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

International Airport of Vienna/Schwechat
Friday, 7 September 2007

Mr President,
Mr Chancellor,
Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear young friends!

With great joy I am now setting foot, for the first time since the beginning of my Pontificate, in the land of Austria, a country which I know well, not least from its geographical closeness to my birthplace. I thank you, Mr President, for the cordial words with which you have welcomed me in the name of the whole Austrian people. You know how close I feel to your native land and to many of the people and places in your country. This cultural space in the heart of Europe transcends borders and brings together ideas and energies from various parts of the continent. The culture of this country is deeply imbued with the message of Jesus Christ and the activity which the Church has carried out in his name. All this, and much more, gives me a vivid sense, dear Austrian friends, of being “at home” here in your midst.

The reason for my coming to Austria is the 850th anniversary of the shrine of Mariazell. This Marian sanctuary in some way represents the maternal heart of Austria, and has always had a particular importance also for Hungarians and the Slavic peoples. It symbolizes an openness which not only transcends physical and national frontiers, but, in the person of Mary, reminds us of an essential dimension of human beings: their capacity for openness to God and his word of truth.

In this way, I would like, during these three days here in Austria, to go as a pilgrim to Mariazell. In recent years, I have been pleased to notice among many people an increased interest in the idea of pilgrimage. Journeying as pilgrims, young people in particular have found a new way to reflect and meditate; they come to know one another and together they encounter creation and the history of faith which, often and perhaps unexpectedly, they experience as a source of strength for the present. I intend my pilgrimage to Mariazell to be a journey made in the company of all the pilgrims of our time. In this spirit I will soon lead the people in prayer in the centre of Vienna, prayer which, like a spiritual pilgrimage, will accompany these days throughout your country.

Mariazell does not only represent 850 years of history, but shows us on the basis of that history – as reflected in the statue of the Blessed Mother pointing to Christ her Son – the way to the future. In view of this, today I would like, along with Austria's political authorities and the representatives of international organizations, to take another look at our present and our future.

Tomorrow, the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, the patronal feast of Mariazell, will bring me to that holy place. In the Eucharistic celebration in front of the Basilica we will gather, as Mary has shown us, around Christ who comes into our midst. We will ask him to help us better to contemplate him, to see him in our brothers and sisters, to serve him in them, and to walk with him on the way that leads to the Father. As pilgrims to the Shrine, we will be united in prayer and, thanks to the communications media, united also with the faithful and all men and women of good will within this country and far beyond its borders.

Pilgrimage means more than just journeying to a shrine. The journey back to our everyday life is also fundamental. Each week of our ordinary life begins with Sunday – with this liberating gift of God which we wish to receive and treasure. And so we will celebrate Mass this Sunday in Saint Stephen's Cathedral – in communion with all those gathered for Holy Mass in the parish churches of Austria and throughout the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen! I know that in Austria many people, on Sunday, the day of rest from work, and during their free time on other days of the week, engage in volunteer work and service to others. Such commitment, offered generously and disinterestedly for the welfare of others, also marks the pilgrimage of our life. Whoever, "looks to" his neighbour – seeing him and helping him – looks to Christ and serves him. Guided and encouraged by Mary, we wish to sharpen our gaze as Christians, in order to see the challenges which need to be met in the spirit of the Gospel and, full of gratitude and hope, to walk from a past which has been at times difficult, yet always filled with

grace, towards a future of promise.

Mr. President, dear Friends! I am looking forward to spending these days in Austria. At the beginning of my pilgrimage, I greet all of you with a heartfelt *Grüß Gott!*

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