



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GERMANY

22-25 SEPTEMBER 2011

DEPARTURE CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Lahr Airport

Sunday, 25 September 2011

(Video)

*My dear Mr President of the Federal Republic,
Distinguished Representatives of the Federal Government,
of Baden Württemberg and its Communities,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Before leaving Germany, I would like very much to thank you for these days, so moving and eventful, spent in our native land.

I am grateful to you, President Wulff, for welcoming me in Berlin in the name of the German people and now, at the moment of my departure, for again honouring me with your gracious words. My thoughts turn to the representatives of the Federal Government and the governments of the Länder who are present at this departure ceremony. I offer heartfelt thanks to Archbishop Zollitsch of Freiburg, who accompanied me throughout the journey. I likewise express my gratitude to Archbishop Woelki of Berlin and Bishop Wanke of Erfurt, who also showed me hospitality, and to the entire German episcopate. Finally I offer a particular word of thanks to all those who worked behind the scenes before and during these four days in order to ensure that all went smoothly: to the civic institutions, to all those engaged in providing security, health services and public

transport, and to the many volunteers. I thank all of you for these splendid days, for our many personal encounters and for your many signs of attention and affection.

In Berlin, the Federal Capital, I had the particular opportunity of addressing the members of the Bundestag and presenting some reflections on the intellectual foundations of the state of law. I also readily think of the fruitful conversations which I had with the Federal President and the Federal Chancellor about the present state of the German people and the international community. I was particularly touched by the cordial welcome and enthusiasm shown by so many people in Berlin.

Here in the land of the Reformation, Christian unity was naturally a high point of my journey. I would mention in particular my meeting with representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany, which took place in the former Augustinian convent of Erfurt. I am profoundly grateful for our fraternal exchange and common prayer. Significant too were my meetings with Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Christians, as well with Jews and Muslims.

Of course my visit was particularly aimed at the Catholic communities in Berlin, Erfurt, Eichsfeld and Freiburg. I gladly recall our common liturgical celebrations and the joy which accompanied them, our common listening to the word of God and our union in prayer and song – especially in those parts of the country where efforts were made for decades to banish religion from people's lives. This gives me confidence for the future of the Church in Germany and of Christianity in Germany. As in previous visits, it was clear how many people here are bearing witness to their faith and making its transforming power present in today's world.

Last but not least, after the impressive celebration of World Youth Day in Madrid, I was also delighted to be in the presence of large numbers of young people in Freiburg at yesterday's youth vigil.

I would like to encourage the Church in Germany to pursue with resolute confidence the path of faith which leads people back to their roots, to the heart of the Good News of Christ. It will be small communities of believers – and these already exist – whose enthusiasm spreads within a pluralistic society and makes others curious to seek the light which gives life in abundance. “There is nothing more beautiful than to know Christ and to speak to others of our friendship with him” (Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry, 24 April 2005). This experience ultimately gives the certainty that “where God is, there is a future.” Wherever God is present, there is hope: new and often unexpected horizons open up beyond the present and the ephemeral. In this sense I accompany in my thoughts and prayers the path of the Church in Germany.

With vivid memories of these days spent in my native land, I now return to Rome. With the assurance of my prayers for all of you, and for a future of peace and freedom for our country, I bid you farewell with a heartfelt “*Vergelt's Gott*” [May God reward you]. God bless you all!

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