

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 23 May 2007*

Apostolic Journey to Brazil

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At this General Audience I would like to dwell on the Apostolic Journey that I made to Brazil from the 9th to the 14th of this month. After two years of my Pontificate, I have finally had the joy to go to Latin America, which I love dearly and where, in fact, a great part of the world's Catholics live.

Although the goal was Brazil, I felt as if I were embracing the whole of the great Latin American subcontinent, also since the ecclesial event that called me there was the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences.

I would again like to express to my dear Brother Bishops, and in particular to those of São Paulo and of Aparecida, my profound gratitude for the welcome I received. I thank the President of Brazil and the other civil Authorities for their cordial and generous collaboration; with great affection I thank the Brazilian People for the warmth with which they welcomed me - it was truly grand and moving - and for the attention they paid to my words.

First of all, my Journey had the character of an act of praise to God for the "wonders" worked in the Latin American peoples, for the faith that has animated their life and their culture during more than 500 years. In this sense it was a pilgrimage that had its climax in the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, *principal Patron of Brazil*.

The theme of the relationship between faith and culture was always very close to the heart of my venerable Predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II. I wished to take it up again, confirming the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean on the journey of faith that has made and makes living history, as seen in popular piety and art in dialogue with the rich pre-Columbian traditions as well as in many European influences and those of other continents.

Certainly, the memory of a glorious past cannot ignore the shadows that accompany the work of evangelization of the Latin American Continent: it is not possible, in fact, to forget the suffering and the

injustice inflicted by colonizers on the indigenous populations, whose fundamental human rights were often trampled upon.

But the obligation to recall such unjustifiable crimes - crimes, however, already condemned at the time by missionaries like Bartolomé de Las Casas and by theologians like Francisco de Vitoria of the University of Salamanca - must not prevent noting with gratitude the wonderful works accomplished by divine grace among those populations in the course of these centuries.

The Gospel has thus become on the Continent the supporting element of a dynamic synthesis which, with various facets and according to the different nations, nonetheless expresses the identity of the Latin American People.

Today, in the age of globalization, this Catholic identity is still present as the most adequate response, provided that it is animated by a serious spiritual formation and by the principles of the social doctrine of the Church.

Brazil is a great Country that holds deeply rooted Christian values, but also faces enormous social and economic problems. To contribute to their solution, the Church must mobilize all the spiritual and moral strength of her communities, seeking appropriate common policies with the other healthy energies of the Country.

Among the positive elements, I must certainly mention the creativity and the fecundity of that Church, in which new Movements and Institutes of consecrated life are continuously born. Not less praiseworthy is the generous dedication of so many lay faithful, who are very active in the various initiatives promoted by the Church.

Brazil is also a Country that can offer the world the witness of a new development model: the Christian culture can, in fact, facilitate a "reconciliation" between man and creation, beginning with the recovery of personal dignity in its relationship to God the Father.

In this sense, a good example is the "*Fazenda da Esperança*", a network of rehabilitation centres for youth who want to exit the dark tunnel of drugs. In the one I visited, which made a deep impression that I keep alive in my heart, the presence of a monastery of Poor Clares is very meaningful. I think this is emblematic for today's world, which certainly needs a psychological and social, and even more so, a profound spiritual "recovery".

The joyful celebration of the canonization of the first native-born Saint of the Country: [Friar Anthony of St Anne Galvão](#), has also been symbolic. This 18th century Franciscan priest devoted to the Virgin Mary, apostle of the Eucharist and of Confession, was called during his lifetime a "man of peace and charity". His witness is further

confirmation that holiness is the true revolution that can promote the authentic reform of the Church and society.

In the Cathedral of São Paulo I met the Bishops of Brazil, the largest Bishops' Conference in the world. To show them the support of the Successor of Peter was one of the principal aims of my mission, because I know the great challenges that the Gospel proclamation must face in that Country.

I encouraged my confreres to go forward and strengthen the commitment to the new evangelization, exhorting them to develop a capillary and methodical way to spread the Word of God so that the innate and widespread religiosity of the populations can take root and become a mature faith, a personal and communal adherence to the God of Jesus Christ.

I encouraged them to recover everywhere the style of the first Christian community described in the *Acts of the Apostles*: assiduous in catechesis, the sacramental life and charitable works. I know the dedication of these faithful servants of the Gospel who want to present it fully without confusion, watching over the deposit of the faith with discernment; it is also their constant duty to promote social development, principally through the formation of the laity, called to assume responsibility in the field of politics and economics.

I thank God for permitting me to deepen communion with the Brazilian Bishops, and I shall always remember them in my prayer.

Another important moment of the Journey was without doubt the meeting with the young people, hope not only of the future, but a vital force for the Church and society of today. The vigil they held in São Paulo, Brazil, was a festival of hope, illuminated by the words of Christ addressed to the "rich young man" who had asked: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19: 16).

Jesus first of all indicated to him to "keep the commandments" as the way of life, and then invited him to leave all to follow him. The Church still does the same today: first of all, it repropose the commandments, true path of education of freedom for personal and social good; and above all, it proposes the "first commandment" of love, because without love even the commandments cannot give full meaning to life and procure true happiness.

Only the one who meets the love of God in Jesus and sets himself upon this way to practice it among men, becomes his disciple and missionary. I have invited the youth to be apostles of their contemporaries; and for this reason, to always care for their human and spiritual formation; to have a high esteem of marriage and of the way that leads to it, in chastity and responsibility; to be open also to the call to consecrated life for the Kingdom of God. In summary, I

encouraged them to put to good use the "wealth" of their youth, to be the young face of the Church.

The culmination of the Visit was the inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences in the Shrine of Our Lady of *Aparecida*. The theme of this great and important assembly, which will conclude at the end of the month, is "*Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life in him - I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*".

The binomial "disciples and missionaries" corresponds to what Mark's Gospel says in regard to the call of the Apostles: "[Jesus] appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3: 14-15). The word "disciples" recalls, therefore, the formative dimension and following, the communion and friendship with Jesus; the term "missionary" expresses the fruit of discipleship, the witness and the communication of the lived experience, of the truth and love known and assimilated.

To be a disciple and a missionary implies a close bond with the Word of God, the Eucharist and the other sacraments, in order to live in the Church in obedient listening to her teachings.

To renew with joy the will to be Jesus' disciples, to "remain with him", this is the fundamental condition to being a missionary "starting afresh from Christ", according to what Pope John Paul II consigned to the entire Church after the Jubilee of 2000.

My venerable Predecessor always insisted on an evangelization "new in its ardour, methods and expression", as he affirmed speaking to the CELAM Assembly on 9 March 1983 in Haiti (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano [ORE]* English edition, 18 April, p. 9).

I wished my Apostolic Journey to be an exhortation to follow along this way, offering the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* as a unifying perspective, an inseparably theological and social perspective summarized in this expression: *it is love that gives life*. "[T]he presence of God, friendship with the Incarnate Son of God, the light of his Word: these are always fundamental conditions for the presence and efficacy of justice and love in our societies" (*Inaugural Address of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences*, 13 May 2007; *ORE*, 16 May, p. 18).

To the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, venerated under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe as patron of all of Latin America, and to the new Brazilian Saint, Friar Anthony of St Anne Galvão, I entrust the fruit of this unforgettable Apostolic Journey.

To special groups

I am pleased to welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including members of the International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs as well as the young artists from Nairobi. I thank all of you for your prayers during my Visit to Brazil. May God bless you all!

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. In preparation for the Solemnity of Pentecost that we will celebrate this coming Sunday, I exhort you, dear *young people*, to constantly invoke the Holy Spirit, so that he will make you intrepid witnesses of the Risen Christ. May the Spirit of God help you, dear *sick people*, to welcome with faith the weight of suffering and to offer it for the salvation of all people; may he grant you, dear *newly-weds*, the grace to announce with joy and conviction the Gospel of life and to build your families on solid Gospel foundations.

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