

AFRICA IS THE CONTINENT OF HOPE, SAYS BENEDICT XVI

VATICAN CITY, 23 NOV 2011 (VIS) - The Holy Father dedicated his general audience, held this morning in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, to reflections on his recently concluded apostolic trip to Benin. The trip had a threefold purpose: marking the 150th anniversary of evangelisation in that region, consigning the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Africae munus", and paying homage to the late Beninese Cardinal Bernardin Gantin.

The Pope reminisced about the various stages of his journey, beginning with his visit to the basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Ouidah where he "placed the fruits of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops at the feet of the Blessed Virgin. ... Christian communities in Africa", he said, "are now called to renew themselves in the faith, in order to serve reconciliation, justice and peace. They are invited to inner reconciliation in order to become joyful instruments of divine mercy, each contributing to the common good with its own spiritual and material wealth.

"Such a spirit of reconciliation is of course also indispensable in civil life", the Pope added, "and has to remain open to the hope which must also animate the socio-political and economic life of the continent". The Pontiff then turned to focus on his meeting with civil, political and religious authorities in Benin, to whom he had likewise "stressed the hope that must drive the development of the continent", at the same time "highlighting the ardent desire for freedom and justice which has moved the hearts of so many African peoples, especially in recent months".

Speaking of the celebration of the Eucharist at the "Stade de l'amitie" in Cotonou, Benedict XVI noted that the presence of both young and old was "a marvellous testament to the fact that the faith unites the generations and responds to the challenges of every stage of life". During that celebration, the Pope gave the presidents of African episcopal conferences the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Africae munus", in which, he said, "the faithful will find the fundamental guidelines to lead and stimulate the journey of the Church in Africa, which is increasingly called to be 'salt of the earth' and 'light of the world'".

The Holy Father also dwelt on his meeting with children and sick people at the church of St. Rita and at the Home of Peace and Happiness, run by sisters of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. There he had "truly tasted the joy of life, the delight and enthusiasm of the new generations who represent the future of Africa", and had seen "how love and solidarity can cause the power and affection of the risen Christ to be present, even in weakness".

The commitment of clergy, religious and laity is "a sign of sure hope for the future of the Church in Benin", said the Holy Father who also recalled how he had encouraged priests to follow "the path of sanctity, in the awareness that the ministry is not simply a social function, but a means for bringing God to man and man to God".

The Holy Father's meeting with the Beninese episcopate had focused on "the origins of the announcement of the Gospel in their country, by the work of

missionaries", and on his exhortation to them "constantly to rediscover Holy Scripture as a source of spiritual renewal and an opportunity to intensify the faith".

"In Africa", the Holy Father explained, "I saw a freshness in the 'yes' to life, a freshness of religious meaning and hope, a holistic vision of reality where God is not confined to that positivist perspective which, in the final analysis, extinguishes all hope. This tells us that the continent contains reserves of life and vitality for the future, reserves upon which we can rely, upon which the Church can rely.

"My journey", he added in conclusion, "was also by way of being an appeal to Africa to concentrate every effort on announcing the Gospel to those who do not yet know it, to renew the commitment to evangelisation, to which each member of the baptised is called by promoting reconciliation, justice and peace".

You can find more information at: www.visnews.org