

APOSTOLIC VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC
(SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2009)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY BY THE HOLY FATHER

*Tuřany Airport, Brno
Sunday, 27 September 2009*

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (*Mt* 11:28). Jesus invites each of his disciples to spend time with him, to find comfort, sustenance and renewal in him. This invitation is addressed in a special way to our liturgical assembly which, in accordance with the ecclesial ideal, brings the whole of your local Church together with the Successor of Peter. I greet each and every one of you: firstly the Bishop of Brno, to whom I am grateful for the kind words he addressed to me at the start of the Mass, and also the Cardinals and the other Bishops present. I greet the priests, deacons, seminarians, men and women religious, the catechists and pastoral workers, the young people and the many families here. I pay my respects to the civil and military authorities, particularly to the President of the Republic and the First Lady, to the Mayor of the City of Brno and the President of the Region of Southern Moravia, a land rich in history and in cultural, industrial and commercial activity. I should also like to extend warm greetings to the pilgrims from the entire region of Moravia and the nearby dioceses of Slovakia, Poland, Austria and Germany.

Dear friends, regarding the character of today’s liturgical assembly, I gladly supported the decision, mentioned by your Bishop, to base the Scripture readings for Mass on the theme of hope: I supported it in consideration of the people of this beloved land as well as Europe and the whole of humanity, thirsting as it does for something on which to base a firm future. In my second Encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, I emphasized that the only “certain” and “reliable” hope (cf. no. 1) is founded on God. History has demonstrated the absurdities to which man descends when he excludes God from the horizon of his choices and actions, and how hard it is to build a society inspired by the values of goodness, justice and fraternity, because the human being is free and his freedom remains fragile. Freedom has constantly to be won over for the cause of good, and the arduous search for the “right way to order human affairs” is a task that belongs to all generations (cf. *ibid.*, 24-25). That, dear friends, is why our first reason for being here is to listen, to listen to a

word that will show us the way that leads to hope; indeed, we are listening to the only word that can give us firm hope, because it is God's word.

In the first reading (*Is* 61:1-3a), the Prophet speaks as one invested with the mission of proclaiming liberation, consolation and joy to all the afflicted and the poor. Jesus took up this text and re-applied it to himself in his preaching. Indeed, he stated explicitly that the prophet's promise was fulfilled in him (cf. *Lk* 4:16-21). It was completely fulfilled when by dying on the cross and rising from the dead he freed us from our slavery to selfishness and evil, to sin and death. And this is the message of salvation, ancient and ever new, that the Church proclaims from generation to generation: Christ crucified and risen, the Hope of humanity!

This word of salvation still resounds with power today, in our liturgical assembly. Jesus addresses himself lovingly to you, sons and daughters of this blessed land, in which the seed of the Gospel has been sown for over a thousand years. Your country, like other nations, is experiencing cultural conditions that often present a radical challenge to faith and therefore also to hope. In fact, in the modern age both faith and hope have undergone a "shift", because they have been relegated to the private and other-worldly sphere, while in day-to-day public life confidence in scientific and economic progress has been affirmed (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 17). We all know that this progress is ambiguous: it opens up possibilities for good as well as evil. Technical developments and the improvement of social structures are important and certainly necessary, but they are not enough to guarantee the moral welfare of society (cf. *ibid.*, 24). Man needs to be liberated from material oppressions, but more profoundly, he must be saved from the evils that afflict the spirit. And who can save him if not God, who is Love and has revealed his face as almighty and merciful Father in Jesus Christ? Our firm hope is therefore Christ: in him, God has loved us to the utmost and has given us life in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10), the life that every person, even if unknowingly, longs to possess.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." These words of Jesus, written in large letters above the entrance to your Cathedral in Brno, he now addresses to each of us, and he adds: "Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (*Mt* 11:29-30). Can we remain indifferent in the face of his love? Here, as elsewhere, many people suffered in past centuries for remaining faithful to the Gospel, and they did not lose hope; many people sacrificed themselves in order to restore dignity to man and freedom to peoples, finding in their generous adherence to Christ the strength to build a new humanity. In present-day society, many forms of poverty are born from isolation, from being unloved, from the rejection of God and from a deep-seated tragic closure in man who believes himself to be self-sufficient, or else merely an insignificant and transient datum; in this world of ours which is alienated "when too much trust is placed in merely human projects" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 53), only Christ can be our certain hope. This is the message that we Christians are called to spread every day, through our witness.

Proclaim it yourselves, dear priests, as you remain intimately united to Jesus, as you exercise your ministry enthusiastically, certain that nothing can be lacking in those who

put their trust in him. Bear witness to Christ, dear religious, through the joyful and consistent practice of the evangelical counsels, indicating where our true homeland lies: in Heaven. And you, dear young people, dear lay faithful, dear families, base on the firm foundation of faith in Christ whatever plans you have for your family, for work, for school, for activities in every sphere of society. Jesus never abandons his friends. He assures us of his help, because nothing can be done without him, but at the same time, he asks everyone to make a personal commitment to spread his universal message of love and peace. May you draw encouragement from the example of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the principal patrons of Moravia, who evangelized the Slavic peoples, and of Saints Peter and Paul, to whom your Cathedral is dedicated. Look to the shining testimony of Saint Zdislava, mother of a family, rich in works of religion and works of mercy; of Saint John Sarkander, priest and martyr; of Saint Clement Maria Hofbauer, priest and religious, born in this diocese and canonized one hundred years ago, and of Blessed Restituta Kafkova, a religious sister born in Brno and killed by the Nazis in Vienna. May you always be accompanied and protected by Our Lady, Mother of Christ our Hope. Amen!

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