

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

**HOLY MASS ON THE LITURGICAL MEMORIAL
OF SAINT WENCESLAUS, PATRON SAINT OF THE CZECH NATION**

HOMILY BY THE HOLY FATHER

*Esplanade on the Way to Melnik in Stará Boleslav
Monday, 28 September 2009*

*Dear Cardinals,
My Brother Bishops and Priests,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Dear Young People,*

It gives me great joy to be with you this morning, as my apostolic visit to the beloved Czech Republic draws to a close, and I offer all of you my heartfelt greeting, especially the Cardinal Archbishop, to whom I am grateful for the words that he addressed to me in your name at the start of Mass. My greeting goes also to the other Cardinals, the Bishops, the priests and consecrated persons, the representatives of lay movements and associations, and especially the young people. I respectfully greet the President of the Republic, to whom I offer cordial good wishes on the occasion of his name-day; and I gladly extend these wishes to all who bear the name of Wenceslaus and to the entire Czech people on the day of this national feast.

This morning, we are gathered around the altar for the glorious commemoration of the martyr Saint Wenceslaus, whose relics I was able to venerate before Mass in the Basilica dedicated to him. He shed his blood in your land, and his eagle, which – as the Cardinal Archbishop has just mentioned – you chose as a symbol for this visit, constitutes the historical emblem of the noble Czech nation. This great saint, whom you are pleased to call the “eternal” Prince of the Czechs, invites us always to follow Christ faithfully, he invites us to be holy. He himself is a model of holiness for all people, especially the leaders of communities and peoples. Yet we ask ourselves: in our day, is holiness still relevant? Or is it now considered unattractive and unimportant? Do we not place more value today on worldly success and glory? Yet how long does earthly success last, and what value does it have?

The last century – as this land of yours can bear witness – saw the fall of a number of powerful figures who had apparently risen to almost unattainable heights. Suddenly they found themselves stripped of their power. Those who denied and continue to deny God, and in consequence have no respect for man, appear to have a comfortable life and to be materially successful. Yet one need only scratch the surface to realize how sad and unfulfilled these people are. Only those who maintain in their hearts a holy “fear of God” can also put their trust in man and spend their lives building a more just and fraternal world. Today there is a need for believers with credibility, who are ready to spread in every area of society the Christian principles and ideals by which their action is inspired. This is holiness, the universal vocation of all the baptized, which motivates people to carry out their duty with fidelity and courage, looking not to their own selfish interests but to the common good, seeking God’s will at every moment.

In the Gospel we heard Jesus speaking clearly on this subject: “What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” (*Mt* 16:26). In this way we are led to consider that the true value of human life is measured not merely in terms of material goods and transient interests, because it is not material goods that quench the profound thirst for meaning and happiness in the heart of every person. This is why Jesus does not hesitate to propose to his disciples the “narrow” path of holiness: “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (16:25). And he resolutely repeats to us this morning: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (16:24). Without doubt, this is hard language, difficult to accept and put into practice, but the testimony of the saints assures us that it is possible for all who trust and entrust themselves to Christ. Their example encourages those who call themselves Christian to be credible, that is, consistent with the principles and the faith that they profess. It is not enough to appear good and honest: one must truly be so. And the good and honest person is one who does not obscure God’s light with his own ego, does not put himself forward, but allows God to shine through.

This is the lesson we can learn from Saint Wenceslaus, who had the courage to prefer the kingdom of heaven to the enticement of worldly power. His gaze never moved away from Jesus Christ, who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps, as Saint Peter writes in the second reading that we just heard. As an obedient disciple of the Lord, the young prince Wenceslaus remained faithful to the Gospel teachings he had learned from his saintly grandmother, the martyr Ludmila. In observing these, even before committing himself to build peaceful relations within his lands and with neighbouring countries, he took steps to spread the Christian faith, summoning priests and building churches. In the first Old Slavonic “narration”, we read that “he assisted God’s ministers and he also adorned many churches” and that “he was benevolent to the poor, clothed the naked, gave food to the hungry, welcomed pilgrims, just as the Gospel enjoins. He did not allow injustice to be done to widows, he loved all people, whether poor or rich”. He learned from the Lord to be “merciful and gracious” (*Responsorial Psalm*), and animated by the Gospel spirit he was even able to pardon his brother who tried to kill him. Rightly, then, you invoke him as the “heir” of your nation, and in a well-known song, you ask him not to let it perish.

Wenceslaus died as a martyr for Christ. It is interesting to note that, by killing him, his brother Boleslaus succeeded in taking possession of the throne of Prague, but the crown placed on the heads of his successors did not bear his name. Rather, it bears the name of Wenceslaus, as a testimony that “the throne of the king who judges the poor in truth will remain firm for ever” (cf. today’s *Office of Readings*). This fact is judged as a miraculous intervention by God, who does not abandon his faithful: “the conquered innocent defeated the cruel conqueror just as Christ did on the cross” (cf. *The Legend of Saint Wenceslaus*), and the blood of the martyr did not cry out for hatred or revenge, but rather for pardon and peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, together let us give thanks to the Lord in this Eucharist for giving this saintly ruler to your country and to the Church. Let us also pray that, like him, we too may walk along the path of holiness. It is certainly difficult, since faith is always exposed to multiple challenges, but when we allow ourselves to be drawn towards God who is Truth, the path becomes decisive, because we experience the power of his love. May the intercession of Saint Wenceslaus and of the other patron saints of the Czech Lands obtain this grace for us. May we always be protected and assisted by Mary, Queen of Peace and Mother of Love. Amen!

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