

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

**MEETING WITH THE CIVIL AND POLITICAL AUTHORITIES
AND WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS**

ADDRESS BY THE HOLY FATHER

*Presidential Palace of Prague
Saturday, 26 September 2009*

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am grateful for the opportunity to meet, in such a remarkable setting, the political and civil authorities of the Czech Republic and the members of the diplomatic community. I warmly thank President Klaus for his kind words of greeting in your name. I also express my appreciation to the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra for the musical performance which opened our gathering, and which eloquently expressed both the roots of Czech culture and the outstanding contribution which this nation has made to European culture.

My pastoral visit to the Czech Republic coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, and the “Velvet Revolution” which restored democracy to this nation. The euphoria that ensued was expressed in terms of freedom. Two decades after the profound political changes which swept this continent, the process of healing and rebuilding continues, now within the wider context of European unification and an increasingly globalized world. The aspirations of citizens and the expectations placed on governments called for new models of civic life and solidarity between nations and peoples without which the long desired future of justice, peace and prosperity would remain elusive. Such desires continue to evolve. Today, especially among the young, the question again emerges as to the nature of the freedom gained. To what end is freedom exercised? What are its true hallmarks?

Every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs, seeking to understand the proper use of human freedom (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 25). And while the duty to strengthen “structures of freedom” is vital, it is never enough: human aspirations soar beyond the self, beyond what any political or economic authority can provide, towards a radiant hope (cf. *ibid.*, 35) that has its origin beyond ourselves yet is encountered within, as truth and beauty and goodness. Freedom seeks purpose: it requires conviction. True freedom presupposes the search for truth – for the true good – and hence finds its fulfilment precisely in knowing and doing what is right and just. Truth, in other words, is the guiding norm for freedom, and goodness is

freedom's perfection. Aristotle defined the good as "that at which all things aim", and went on to suggest that "though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1; cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, 2). Indeed, the lofty responsibility to awaken receptivity to truth and goodness falls to all leaders – religious, political and cultural, each in his or her own way. Jointly we must engage in the struggle for freedom and the search for truth, which either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 90).

For Christians, truth has a name: God. And goodness has a face: Jesus Christ. The faith of Christians, from the time of Saints Cyril and Methodius and the early missionaries, has in fact played a decisive role in shaping the spiritual and cultural heritage of this country. It must do likewise in the present and into the future. The rich patrimony of spiritual and cultural values, each finding expression in the other, has not only given shape to the nation's identity but has also furnished it with the vision necessary to exercise a role of cohesion at the heart of Europe. For centuries this territory has been a meeting point between various peoples, traditions, and cultures. As we are all aware, it has known painful chapters and carries the scars of tragic events born of misunderstanding, war and persecution. Yet it is also true, that its Christian roots have nourished a remarkable spirit of forgiveness, reconciliation and cooperation which has enabled the people of these lands to find freedom and to usher in a new beginning, a new synthesis, a renewal of hope. Is it not precisely this spirit that contemporary Europe requires?

Europe is more than a continent. It is a home! And freedom finds its deepest meaning in a spiritual homeland. With full respect for the distinction between the political realm and that of religion – which indeed preserves the freedom of citizens to express religious belief and live accordingly – I wish to underline the irreplaceable role of Christianity for the formation of the conscience of each generation and the promotion of a basic ethical consensus that serves every person who calls this continent, "home"! In this spirit, I acknowledge the voice of those who today, across this country and continent, seek to apply their faith respectfully yet decisively in the public arena, in the expectation that social norms and policies be informed by the desire to live by the truth that sets every man and woman free (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, 9).

Fidelity to the peoples whom you serve and represent requires fidelity to the truth which alone is the guarantee of freedom and integral human development (cf. *ibid.*, 9). Courage to articulate the truth in fact serves all members of society by shedding light on the path of human progress, indicating its ethical and moral foundations, and ensuring that public policy draws upon the treasury of human wisdom. Sensibility to universal truth should never be eclipsed by particular interests, important though they may be, for such would lead only to new examples of the social fragmentation or discrimination which those very interest or lobby groups purport to overcome. Indeed, far from threatening the tolerance of differences or cultural plurality, the pursuit of truth makes consensus possible, keeps public debate logical, honest and accountable, and ensures the unity which vague notions of integration simply cannot achieve. In the light of the Church's tradition of temporal, intellectual, and spiritual charity, I am confident that members of the Catholic community – together with members of other Churches, ecclesial communities, and religions – will

continue to pursue development goals that possess a more humane and humanizing value both in this nation and beyond (cf. *ibid.*, 9).

Dear friends, our presence in this magnificent capital, which is often spoken of as the heart of Europe, prompts us to ask in what that “heart” consists. While there is no simple answer to that question, surely a clue is found in the architectural jewels that adorn this city. The arresting beauty of its churches, castle, squares and bridges cannot but draw our minds to God. Their beauty expresses faith; they are epiphanies of God that rightly leave us pondering the glorious marvels to which we creatures can aspire when we give expression to the aesthetic and the noetic aspects of our innermost being. How tragic it would be if someone were to behold such examples of beauty, yet ignore the transcendent mystery to which they point. The creative encounter of the classical tradition and the Gospel gave birth to a vision of man and society attentive to God’s presence among us. In shaping the cultural patrimony of this continent it insisted that reason does not end with what the eye sees but rather is drawn to what lies beyond, that for which we deeply yearn: the Spirit, we might say, of Creation.

At the present crossroads of civilization, so often marked by a disturbing sundering of the unity of goodness, truth and beauty and the consequent difficulty in finding an acceptance of common values, every effort for human progress must draw inspiration from that living heritage. Europe, in fidelity to her Christian roots, has a particular vocation to uphold this transcendent vision in her initiatives to serve the common good of individuals, communities, and nations. Of particular importance is the urgent task to encourage young Europeans with a formation that respects and nurtures their God-given capacity to transcend the very limits which are sometimes presumed to entrap them. In sports, the creative arts and academic pursuit, young people welcome the opportunity to excel. Is it not equally true that when presented with high ideals they will also aspire to moral virtue and a life of compassion and goodness? I warmly encourage parents and community leaders who expect authorities to promote the values which integrate the intellectual, human and spiritual dimensions of a sound education worthy of the aspirations of our young.

“*Veritas vincit*”. This is the motto that the flag of the President of the Czech Republic bears: In the end, truth does conquer, not by force, but by persuasion, by the heroic witness of men and women of firm principle, by sincere dialogue which looks beyond self-interest to the demands of the common good. The thirst for truth, beauty and goodness, implanted in all men and women by the Creator, is meant to draw people together in the quest for justice, freedom and peace. History has amply shown that truth can be betrayed and manipulated in the service of false ideologies, oppression and injustice. But do not the challenges facing the human family call us to look beyond those dangers? For in the end, what is more inhuman, and destructive, than the cynicism which would deny the grandeur of our quest for truth, and the relativism that corrodes the very values which inspire the building of a united and fraternal world? Instead, we must reappropriate a confidence in the nobility and breadth of the human spirit in its capacity to grasp the truth, and let that confidence guide us in the patient work of politics and diplomacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, with these sentiments I offer prayerful good wishes that your service be inspired and sustained by the light of that truth which is a reflection of the eternal Wisdom of God the Creator. Upon you and your families I cordially invoke an abundance of divine blessings.

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