

PRESS INFORMATION PAPAL VISIT 2011

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FIRST SUMMARY

Pope arrives in Germany

Benedict XVI intends to talk to his fellow Germans about God

Pope Benedict XVI began his first official visit to Germany on Thursday. An Italian aircraft bearing the papal coat of arms landed at Berlin's Tegel airport at 10.16 a.m.. There the Pope and his retinue were received by a guard of honour comprising members of the Bundeswehr, schoolchildren from Berlin and high-ranking representatives of the Federal Republic and the Catholic Church in Germany.

In his first address, held in the garden at Bellevue Palace, the Pope thanked Federal President Christian Wulff for the invitation and stated that, unlike other statesmen, he had not come in order to pursue political or economic goals. His intention was rather to meet people in his homeland and talk to them about God. Benedict XVI expressed his regret concerning the growing indifference toward religion. As he put it, religion is 'one of the foundations' of successful coexistence.

The Pope emphasised that 'freedom needs to be grounded in a higher authority'. As he explained, the fact that there are values which 'cannot be manipulated by anything or anyone' is the 'real guarantee of our freedom'. He said he hoped that his meetings in Berlin, in Erfurt, in the Eichsfeld region and in Freiburg would make 'a small contribution' toward the rediscovery of such fundamental values.

Wulff: 'The Church is not a parallel society'

Federal President Wulff said that millions of people were 'looking forward to the next few days with great joy and curiosity'. Benedict XVI's visit

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would, as he put it, 'help us all to find guidance and standards'. He noted that Germany was a country in which Christian faith 'could no longer be taken for granted'. Many people are searching. As people faced crises and injustice, and experienced personal uncertainty, their longing for meaning was growing. This, he noted, was both a great opportunity and a responsibility for the religious communities.

The Federal President said that in Germany the Church and the state are 'separate, and rightly so'. The Church is 'not a parallel society', though. He explained that the Church lives in the midst of this society, in this world and this age. This is why it is challenged time and time again by new questions, such as the question of how compassionately it deals with failures in people's life histories, and failures in its own history. Therefore, he continued, he was pleased that the process of dialogue had begun for the Catholic Church in Germany, and that the Pope would also be visiting an 'important site of Martin Luther's activities' at Erfurt, in the 'homeland of the Reformation'.

Following the welcome ceremony the Pope met in private with the Federal President and his family, and with Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and her husband Professor Joachim Sauer. Vatican spokesperson Federico Lombardi subsequently reported that the atmosphere at the meetings had been 'highly positive and friendly'. The issues discussed were confidential. Speaking to the Federal Chancellor, the Pope expressed his appreciation of Germany's solidarity and engagement in the face of global crises. The first few hours of the visit, which will continue until Sunday, were described as 'a good start'.