

Pope Benedict urges end to fighting in Libya

The BBC's David Willey says the Pope asked for Europeans to show goodwill to migrants escaping the conflict.



The Pope has urged diplomacy and dialogue to end the conflict in Libya, in his blessing at Easter Sunday Mass in St Peter's Square at the Vatican.

Pope Benedict also called for relief to be delivered to all those in need as a result of the conflict.

Speaking about the Middle East, he expressed hope that peace would triumph over division, hate and violence.

He also appealed for solidarity with refugees fleeing conflict, particularly from African countries.

The head of the Roman Catholic Church appeared before of tens of thousands of worshippers.

Resplendent in white and gold, Benedict led the ceremony from an altar set up on the steps of the basilica, under a red canopy to shield him from rain or sun. Some 42,000 bright flowers and plants donated by Holland bedecked the square, to symbolise hope and love.

The 84-year-old looked relaxed although his voice cracked slightly as he intoned prayers during the sung parts of the Mass, correspondents say.

Christians worldwide celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter, a sign of eternal life following his crucifixion, and it is one of the busiest times for the Pope.

'Open your hearts'



As many as 100,000 people attended the Mass His Easter message, or "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) as it is known, traditionally comments on the world's trouble spots.

It came in a year when pro-democracy unrest swept away the leaders of Egypt and Tunisia and is set to remove the president of Yemen. In Libya, however, it has led to a bloody civil war.

"In the current conflict in Libya, may diplomacy and dialogue take the place of arms and may those who suffered as a result of the conflict, be given access to humanitarian aid," the Pope said.

He voiced the hope that all citizens in North Africa and the Middle East might build a society "where poverty is defeated and every political choice is inspired by respect for the human person".

Pope Benedict urged "people of good will" to "open their hearts" to refugees from the turmoil in North Africa, a politically sensitive issue in western Europe, where Italy and France are wrangling over their freedom of movement.

Looking beyond the Arab world, the pontiff called for Ivory Coast to "tread the path of reconciliation and pardon" after its recent civil war, and prayed that Japan might find consolation after the 11 March earthquake and tsunami.

In keeping with tradition, the Pope ended his appearance by offering his Easter blessing in more than 60 languages.

BBC's David Willey