

The Pope Begins his trip to Mexico and Cuba Under the Sign of Hope

THE POPE BEGINS HIS TWENTY-THIRD APOSTOLIC TRIP UNDER THE SIGN OF HOPE



Vatican City, 23 March 2012 (VIS) - Benedict XVI today began his twenty-third apostolic trip abroad, which is taking him to Mexico and Cuba. The Holy Father departed from Rome's Fiumicino airport at 9.30 a.m. and is due to land at Leon in the Mexican State of Guanajuato at 4.30 p.m. local time (11.30 p.m. in Rome). Leon is the fourth largest city in Mexico and lies at the geographical centre of the country.

The Holy Father will remain in Mexico until 26 March, during which time he will lodge in the Miraflores College, an educational institution named after a Carthusian monastery in Burgos, Spain, and run by the Sisters Servants of the Blessed Eucharist and of the Mother of God. The Pope's three days in Mexico will be divided as follows: On Saturday he will meet Federal President Felipe Calderon Hinojosa, then greet and bless children and faithful in Leon's Plaza de la Paz. At 10 a.m. on Sunday he will preside at Mass in the Parque Bicentenario and, that evening, preside at Vespers in the cathedral of Leon. He is due to depart for Cuba on Monday 26 March.

In his weekly editorial for "Octavia Dies", Holy See Press Office Director Fr. Federico Lombardi S.J. enumerates the reasons for the Pope's trip to Mexico and Cuba: The bicentenary of the independence of the peoples of Latin America; the Mexicans' enthusiastic desire to welcome the Pope; the twentieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the Holy See, and the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the image of "Nuestra Senora de la Caridad del Cobre" in Cuba, with its concomitant Holy Year.

However, Fr. Lombardi notes, "this voyage to the heart of the Americas also has a specific purpose. It will be a journey of hope. Hope for Mexicans, a people with immense resources and potential, but currently afflicted by serious problems which weigh on their present and future, first among them the problem of violence".

The Holy See Press Office Director also speaks of "hope for Cubans, who feel they are on the threshold of what is potentially a new epoch, in which John Paul II's words on the reciprocal openness of Cuba and the world may be realised in a climate of development, freedom and reconciliation".

Finally, Fr. Lombardi mentions "the hope of all Latin America, where a Church committed to the 'continental mission' launched at the Aparecida Conference, wishes to continue making her inspirational contribution to the progress of the continent, so that human and Christian values may guarantee integral human development, despite the difficulties and dangers of our time".

Vatican Information Service