

Pope Praises Faith of Americans

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Staff Writer

(April 16, 2008) Speaking beneath a brilliant blue sky on the South Lawn of the White House, Pope Benedict XVI expressed the hope that his visit to the U.S. would usher in “a renewal of hope for the Church in the United States and strengthen the will of Catholics to contribute even more responsibly to the life of this nation . . .”

The Pope made his first public comments since landing in America yesterday afternoon before a crowd of almost 10,000 people. He sat side-by-side with President Bush as the Marine Band played the national anthems of the Holy See and the U.S. American Soprano Kathleen Battle sang “The Lord’s Prayer” just after the U.S. Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps marched before the two leaders.

Children could be seen waving flags that read, “We love you, Pope of Hope” and the crowd sang two renditions of “Happy Birthday” in honor of Benedict’s 81st birthday.

President Bush listed the nation’s finest virtues in his remarks: it’s prayer, compassion and belief in religious liberty. He called it “the most innovative, creative and dynamic country on earth” while also being the most religious.

Turning to the Pope, he said, “In a world where some treat life as something to be debased and discarded, we need your message that all human life is sacred and that each of us is willed, each of us is loved.”

After a burst of spontaneous applause, he continued, “In a world where some no longer believe we can distinguish between simple right and wrong, we need your message to reject this dictatorship of relativism and embrace a culture of justice and truth.”

The Pope’s comments were laced with praise for the faith of the nation and encouraged Americans to let this be the guide and foundation of their life.

“As the nation faces the increasing conflicts of the political and ethical issues of our time, I’m confident that the American people will find in their religious beliefs a precious source of insight and inspiration to pursue reasoned and responsible dialogue in their efforts to build a more human and free society.”

Freedom is not only a gift, he said, but one that comes with personal responsibility.

“The preservation of freedom calls for the cultivation of virtue, self discipline, sacrifice fo the common good and a sense of responsibility for the less fortunate. Few have understood this as clearly as the late John Paul II.

“In reflecting on the spiritual victory of freedom, he reminded us that history shows time and

again ‘that in a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and the democracy it values can lose its very soul.’

“His prophetic words were in some sense expressed by George Washington when he said that ‘religion and morality represent the indispensable support of political prosperity.’”

Referring to his address to the United Nations on Friday, the Pope said that “On this sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, the need for global solidarity is as urgent as ever” and called upon the global community to enable people to “live in a way worthy of their dignity as brothers and sisters” so that all might find a place at “the table which God’s bounty has set for all God’s children.”

He also called for the “patient efforts of international diplomacy to resolve conflicts and promote progress” throughout the world.

The Pope concluded his comments with a broad smile and the acclamation “God bless America!”

He was then escorted into the Blue Room to enjoy birthday cake with the President and Laura Bush before adjourning to the Oval Office for a private discussion with the president.

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