



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO BENIN

18-20 NOVEMBER 2011

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Cardinal Bernardin Gantin International Airport, Cotonou

Friday, 18 November 2011

[Video]

*Mr President,
Your Eminence,
Dear President of the Episcopal Conference of Benin,
Civil, Ecclesiastical and Religious Authorities,
Dear Friends,*

I thank you, Mr President, for the warm words of welcome. You know well the affection which I have for your continent and for your country. I was eager to return to Africa, and a threefold motivation has provided the occasion for this Apostolic Journey. First and foremost, Mr President, is your kind invitation to visit your country. Your initiative was received along with that of the Episcopal Conference of Benin. These are auspicious, since they come during the year in which Benin celebrates the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See, as well the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of her evangelization. While among you, I will have the occasion to meet many people, and I look forward to it. Each of these experiences will be different, and will culminate in the Eucharist which I will celebrate before I leave.

This Apostolic Journey also fulfils my desire to bring back to African soil the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*. Its reflections will guide the pastoral activities of numerous Christian communities in the coming years. May this document fall into the ground and take root, grow and bear much fruit “in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty”, as we

hear in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (*Mt 13:23*).

Additionally, there exists a third reason which is more personal and more emotive. I have long held in high esteem a son of this country, His Eminence Cardinal Bernardin Gantin. For many years, we both worked, each according to his proper competence, labouring in the same vineyard. We both happily assisted my predecessor, [Blessed John Paul II](#), in the exercise of his Petrine ministry. We had many occasions to meet, to engage in profound discussions and to pray together. Cardinal Gantin won the respect and the affection of many. So it seemed right that I should come to his country of origin, to pray before his tomb, and to thank Benin for having given the Church such a distinguished son.

Benin is a country of ancient and noble traditions. Her history is significant. I am pleased to take this opportunity to greet the traditional Chiefs. Their contribution is important in the construction of the country's future. I would like to encourage them to contribute, with their wisdom and understanding of local customs, in the delicate transition currently under way from tradition to modernity.

Modernity need not provoke fear, but neither can it be constructed by neglecting the past. It needs to be accompanied by prudence for the good of all in order to avoid the pitfalls which exist on the African continent and elsewhere, such as unconditional surrender to the law of the market or that of finance, nationalism or exaggerated and sterile tribalism which can become destructive, a politicization of interreligious tensions to the detriment of the common good, or finally the erosion of human, cultural, ethical and religious values. The transition to modernity must be guided by sure criteria based on recognized virtues, which are listed in your national motto, but equally which are firmly rooted in the dignity of the person, the importance of the family and respect for life. All of these values exist in view of the common good which must take first place, and which must constitute the primary concern of all in positions of responsibility. God trusts in man and desires his good. It is our task to respond, in honesty and justice, to his high expectations.

The Church, for her part, offers her own specific contribution. By her presence, her prayer and her various works of mercy, especially in education and health care, she wishes to give her best to everyone. She wants to be close to those who are in need, near to those who search for God. She wants to make it understood that God is neither absent nor irrelevant as some would have us believe but that he is the friend of man. It is in this spirit of friendship and of fraternity that I come to your country, Mr President.

ACE MAWU TON NI KON DO BENIN TO O BI JI [*in Fon: May God bless Benin!*]

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