

COLOGNE, Germany, AUG. 18, 2005: The address Benedict XVI upon arriving at the Cologne Airport for the World Youth Day celebrations.

*Mr. President,
Distinguished Political and Civil Authorities,
Your Eminences and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Citizens of the Federal Republic,*

My Dear Young People!

With deep joy I find myself for the first time after my election to the Chair of Peter in my beloved homeland, in Germany. With deep emotion I thank God who has enabled me to begin my Pastoral Visits outside Italy with this visit to the nation of my birth. I have come to Cologne for the Twentieth World Youth Day, which had already been planned by my Predecessor, the unforgettable Pope John Paul II. I am sincerely grateful to all present for the warm welcome given to me. My respectful greeting goes first to the President of the Federal Republic, Mr Horst Köhler, whom I thank for the gracious words of welcome which he addressed to me in the name of all the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany. I also express my gratitude to the Representatives of the Government, the Members of the Diplomatic Corps and the civil and military Authorities. With fraternal affection I greet the Pastor of the Archdiocese of Cologne, Cardinal Joachim Meisner. My greeting also goes to the other Bishops, the priests, men and women religious, and to all those engaged in various pastoral activities in the German-speaking Dioceses. At this moment I also greet with affection all those living in the different Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In these days of intense preparation for the World Youth Day, the Dioceses of Germany, and the Diocese and City of Cologne in particular, have been enlivened by the presence of very many young people from different parts of the world. I wish to thank all those who have so competently and generously helped to organize this worldwide ecclesial event. I am grateful to the parishes, religious institutes, associations, civil organizations and the many individuals who have offered hospitality and so friendly a welcome to the thousands of pilgrims coming here from different continents. The Church in Germany and the people of the German Federal Republic can be proud of their long tradition of openness to the global community; among other things, this is seen in their many initiatives of solidarity, particularly on behalf of developing countries.

In this spirit of esteem and acceptance towards all those who come from different cultures and traditions, we are about to experience World Youth Day in Cologne. That so many young people have come to meet the Successor of Peter is a sign of the Church's vitality. I am happy to be with them, to confirm their faith and to enliven their hope. At the same time, I am sure that I will also receive something from them, especially from their enthusiasm, their sensitivity and their readiness to face the challenges of the future. And so I greet the young people themselves, and all those who have welcomed them in these event-filled days. In addition to intense moments of prayer, reflection and celebration with them and with all those taking part in the various scheduled events, I will have an opportunity to meet the Bishops, to whom even now I

extend a warm greeting. I will also meet the representatives of the other Churches and ecclesial Communities, make a visit to the Synagogue for a meeting with the Jewish community, and also welcome the representatives of some Islamic communities. These meetings are important steps along the journey of dialogue and cooperation in our shared commitment to building a more just and fraternal future, a future, which is truly more human.

During this World Youth Day we will reflect together on the theme: “We Have Come To Worship Him” (*Mt 2:2*). This is a precious opportunity for thinking more deeply about the meaning of life as a “pilgrimage,” guided by a “star,” in search of the Lord. Together we shall consider the Magi, who, coming from various distant lands, were among the first to recognize the promised Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Virgin Mary, and to bow down in worship before him (cf. *Mt 2:1-12*). The ecclesial community and the city of Cologne have a special link with these emblematic figures. Like the Magi, all believers – and young people in particular – have been called to set out on the journey of life in search of truth, justice and love. The ultimate goal of the journey can only be found through an encounter with Christ, an encounter which cannot take place without faith. Along this interior journey we can be guided by the many signs with which a long and rich Christian tradition has indelibly marked this land of Germany: from great historical monuments to countless works of art found throughout the country, from documents preserved in libraries to lively popular traditions, from philosophical inquiry to the theological reflection of her many great thinkers, from the spiritual traditions to the mystical experience of a vast array of Saints. Here we find a rich cultural and spiritual heritage, which even today, in the heart of Europe, testifies to the fruitfulness of the Christian faith and tradition. The Diocese and the region of Cologne, in particular, keep the living memory of great witnesses to Christian civilization. Among others, I think of Saint Boniface, Saint Ursula, Saint Albert the Great, and, in more recent times, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) and Blessed Adolph Kolping. May these, our illustrious brothers and sisters in the faith, who down the centuries have held high the torch of holiness, be “models” and “patrons” of the World Youth Day, which we now celebrate.

To all of you here present I renew my deep gratitude for your gracious welcome, and I pray to the Lord for the future of the Church and of society as a whole in this Federal Republic of Germany, so dear to my heart. May this country’s long history and her great social, economic and cultural attainments be an incentive to renewed commitment in the pursuit of authentic progress, solidarity and development, not only for the German nation, but for the other peoples of the Continent as well. May the Virgin Mary, who presented the Child Jesus to the Magi when they arrived in Bethlehem to worship the Savior, continue to intercede for us, just as for centuries she has kept watch over the German people from her many shrines throughout the German Länder. May the Lord bless everyone here present, together with all the pilgrims and all who live in this land. May God protect the Federal Republic of Germany!