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The Holy Father bids farewell

Address of Benedict XVI to the crowds during the ceremony before his departure from Cologne.

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At the conclusion of this, my first Visit to Germany as the Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Peter, I must express once again my heartfelt gratitude for the welcome given to me, to my collaborators and especially to the many young people

who came to Cologne from every continent for this World Youth Day.

The Lord has called me to succeed our beloved Pope John Paul II, whose inspired idea it was to initiate the series of World Youth Days. I have taken up this legacy with awe and also with joy, and I give thanks to God for giving me the opportunity to experience in the company of so many young people this further step along their spiritual pilgrimage from continent to continent, following the Cross of Christ.

I am grateful to all those who have so effectively ensured that every phase of this extraordinary gathering could take place in an orderly and serene fashion. These days spent together have given many young men and women from the whole world the opportunity to become better acquainted with Germany.

We are all well aware of the evil that emerged from our Homeland during the 20th century, and we acknowledge it with shame and suffering.

During these days, thanks be to God, it has become quite evident that there was and is another Germany, a Land of singular human, cultural and spiritual resources. I hope and pray that these resources, thanks, not least, to the events of recent days, may once more spread throughout the world!

Now young people from all over the world can return home enriched by their contacts and their experiences of dialogue and fellowship in the different regions of our Homeland. I am certain that their stay, marked by their youthful enthusiasm, will remain as a pleasant memory with the people who have offered them such generous hospitality, and that it

will also be a sign of hope for Germany.

Indeed, one can say that during these days Germany has been the centre of the Catholic world.

Young people from every continent and culture, gathered in faith around their Pastors and the Successor of Peter, have shown us a young Church, one that seeks with imagination and courage to shape the face of a more just and generous humanity.

Following the example of the Magi, these young men and women set out to encounter Christ, in accordance with the theme of this World Youth Day. Now they are returning to their own regions and cities to testify to the light, the beauty and the power of the Gospel which they have experienced anew.

Before leaving, I must also express thanks to all who have opened their hearts and their homes to the countless young pilgrims. I am grateful to the Government Authorities, to the political leaders and the various civil and military departments, as well as the security services and the many volunteer organizations which have put so much effort into the preparation and realization of each of the initiatives and events of this World Youth Day.

A special word of thanks goes to all who planned the moments of prayer and reflection, as well as the liturgical celebrations, eloquent examples of the joyful vitality of the faith that animates the younger generation in our time.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the leaders of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and to the representatives of other

religions who wished to be present at this important meeting. I express my hope that we can strengthen our common commitment to train the younger generation in the human and spiritual values which are indispensable for building a future of true freedom and peace.

My deep gratitude goes to Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Archbishop of Cologne, the Diocese that hosted this international meeting, to the Bishops of Germany, led by the President of the Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Karl Lehmann, to the priests, to men and women religious, and to the parish communities, lay associations and movements who have devoted such energy to helping the young people present to reap the spiritual fruits of their stay.

I offer a special word of thanks to the young people from Germany, who in a variety of ways have helped to

welcome other young people and to share with them moments of faith that have been truly memorable. I hope that this event will remain impressed on the life of Germany's Catholics and will be an incentive for a renewed spiritual and apostolic outreach!

May the Gospel be received in its integrity and witnessed with profound conviction by all Christ's disciples, so that it becomes a source of authentic renewal for all of German society, thanks also to dialogue with the different Christian communities and the followers of other religions.

Finally, my respectful and cordial greetings go to the political, civil and diplomatic Authorities present at this Departure Ceremony. In particular, I thank you, Mr President, for your courtesy in desiring to welcome me in person at the beginning of my Visit

and for having desired to be present once again at my Farewell Ceremony. Thank you with all my heart!

Through you, I thank the Government Members and the entire German People, whose numerous representatives have shown me such liking in these intense hours of communion.

Filled with the emotions and memories of these days, I now return to Rome. Upon all of you I invoke God's abundant Blessings for a future of serene prosperity, harmony and peace.

Vatican Press Office