

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO BENIN
18-20 NOVEMBER 2011

MEETING WITH CHILDREN

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Parish church of Saint Rita -Cotonou
Saturday, 19 November 2011

Dear Young Friends,

I thank Bishop René-Marie Ehuzu of Port Novo, Director of Social Ministry of the Benin Bishops' Conference, for his words of welcome. I also thank the parish priest and Aïcha for their words offered on behalf of all of you. After this beautiful moment of Eucharistic adoration, it is with much joy that I greet you. Thank you for coming out in such great numbers!

God our Father has gathered us around his Son and our brother, Jesus Christ, who is present in the host consecrated during the Mass. This is a great mystery before which we worship and we believe. Jesus, who loves us very much, is truly present in the tabernacles of all the churches around the world, in the tabernacles of the churches in your neighbourhoods and in your parishes. I ask you to visit him often to tell him of your love for him.

Some of you have already made your First Holy Communion, and others are preparing for it. The day of my First Holy Communion was one of the most beautiful days of my life. It is the same for you, isn't it? And why is that? It's not only because of our nice clothes or the gifts we receive, nor even because of the parties! It is above all because, that day, we receive Jesus Christ for the first time! When I receive Communion, Jesus comes to live in me. I should welcome him with love and listen closely to him. In the depths of my heart, I can tell him, for example: "Jesus, I know that you love me. Give me your love so that I can love you in return and love others with your love. I give you all my joys, my troubles and my future." Do not hesitate, dear children, to speak of Jesus to others. He is a treasure whom you should share generously. Throughout the history of the Church, the love of Jesus has filled countless Christians, and even young people like yourselves, with courage and strength. In this way, Saint Kizito, a Ugandan boy, was put to death because he wanted to live according to the baptism which he had just received. Kizito prayed. He realized that God is not only important, but that he is everything.

What, then, is prayer? It is a cry of love directed to God our Father, with the will to imitate Jesus our brother. Jesus often went off by himself to pray. Like Jesus, I too can find a calm place to pray where I can quietly stand before a Cross or a holy picture in order to speak to Jesus and to listen to him. I can also use the Gospels. That way, I keep within my heart a passage which has touched me and which will guide me throughout the day. To stay with Jesus like this for a little while lets him fill me with his love, light and life! This love, which I receive in prayer, calls me in turn to give it to my parents, to my friends, to everyone with whom I live, even with those who do not like me, and those whom I do not appreciate enough. Dear young people, Jesus loves you. Ask your parents to pray with you! Sometimes you may even have to push them a little. But do not hesitate to do so. God is that important!

May the Virgin Mary, his Mother, teach you to love more and more through prayer, forgiveness and charity. I entrust you to her, together with your families and teachers. Look! I have this rosary in my pocket. The rosary is like a tool that we can use to pray. It is easy to pray the rosary. Maybe you

know how already; if not, ask your parents to help you to learn how. At the end of this meeting, each one of you will receive a rosary. When you hold it in your hands, I would ask you to pray for the Pope, for the Church and for every important intention. And now, before I bless you all with great affection, let us pray together a *Hail Mary* for children throughout the world, especially for those who are sick, who are hungry and in places of war. Let us pray together: *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

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