

ST. WENCESLAS PREFERRED SANCTITY TO WORLDLY POWER

VATICAN CITY, 28 SEP 2009 (VIS) -

At 8.15 a.m. today the Pope left the apostolic nunciature in Prague and travelled 35 kilometres by car to the church of St. Wenceslas at Stara Boleslav. The church, which stands on the site of the saint's martyrdom, is considered to be the symbolic site of the birth of the Czech nation and is the focus of a national pilgrimage which takes place every year on 28th September.

Wenceslas was born around the year 907 and ascended the throne in 925. According to tradition he was a highly cultured and religious king, a man of justice and a benefactor to the poor. He was killed for political reasons by his brother Boleslav in 935 and in 938 his remains were transferred to Prague cathedral. Ever since the tenth century he has been venerated as a saint.

Arriving at the church, the Holy Father was greeted by the religious and civil authorities. Having paused in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, he descended to the crypt of the Mausoleum of the Czech Nation where the relics of the saint are exposed. Before leaving the building the Pope greeted a group of twenty elderly priests who reside in a house belonging to the episcopal conference. He then travelled by popemobile to the nearby esplanade of Melnik where he celebrated Mass for the Solemnity of St. Wenceslas, feast day of the Czech Republic.

Benedict XVI: The world needs believers with credibility

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In his homily Benedict XVI pointed out that St. Wenceslas "is a model of holiness for all people, especially the leaders of communities and peoples. Yet we ask ourselves: in our day, is

holiness still relevant? ... Do we not place more value today on worldly success and glory? Yet how long does earthly success last, and what value does it have?

"The last century - as this land of yours can bear witness - saw the fall of a number of powerful figures who had apparently risen to almost unattainable heights", he added. "Suddenly they found themselves stripped of their power. Those who denied and continue to deny God, and in consequence have no respect for man, appear to have a comfortable life and to be materially successful. Yet one need only scratch the surface to realize how sad and unfulfilled these people are.

"Only those who maintain in their hearts a holy 'fear of God' can also put their trust in man and spend their lives building a more just and fraternal world. Today there is a need for believers with credibility, who are ready to spread in every area of society the Christian principles and ideals by which their action is inspired. This is holiness, the universal vocation of all the baptised, which motivates people to carry out their duty with fidelity and courage, looking not to their own selfish interests but to the common good, seeking God's will at every moment".

Quoting then from today's Gospel in which Christ pronounces the words: "What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" the Pope reiterated the fact that "the true value of human life is measured not merely in terms of material goods and transient interests, because it is not material goods that quench the profound thirst for meaning and happiness in the heart of every person. This is why Jesus does not hesitate to propose to His disciples the 'narrow' path of holiness".

"The testimony of the saints assures us that it is possible" to follow this path, the Holy Father went on. "Their example encourages those who call themselves Christian to be credible, that is, consistent with the principles and the faith that they profess. It is not enough to appear good and honest: one must truly be so".

"This is the lesson we can learn from St. Wenceslas, who had the courage to prefer the kingdom of heaven to the enticement of worldly power", the Holy Father concluded.

