

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
FOR THE VII WORLD CONGRESS
ON THE PASTORAL CARE OF TOURISM**

[CANCÚN, 23-27 APRIL 2012]

*To my Venerable Brothers
His Eminence Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò,
President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of
Migrants and Itinerant People,
and the Most Reverend Pedro Pablo Elizondo Cárdenas,
Prelate-Bishop of Cancún-Chetumal*

On the occasion of the VII World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Tourism which will take place in Cancún (Mexico) from 23 to 27 April, I am pleased to send you my cordial greeting which I extend to my Brother Bishops and to all those taking part in this important meeting. As you begin these days of reflection on the pastoral attention which the Church dedicates to the area of tourism, I wish to convey my spiritual closeness to the participants and my respectful greetings to the civil authorities and to the representatives of the international organizations that are also present at this event.

Tourism is certainly a phenomenon characteristic of our times, due both to the important dimensions that it has already achieved and in view of its potential for future growth. Like other human realities, it is called to be enlightened and transformed by the Word of God. For this reason, moved by pastoral solicitude and in view of the important influence tourism has on the human person, the Church has accompanied it from its first beginnings, encouraging its potential while at the same time pointing out, and striving to correct, its risks and deviations.

Tourism, together with vacations and free time, is a privileged occasion for physical and spiritual renewal; it facilitates the coming together of people from different cultural backgrounds and offers the opportunity of drawing close to nature and hence opening the way to listening and contemplation, tolerance and peace, dialogue and harmony in the midst of diversity.

Travelling reflects our being as *homo viator*; at the same time it evokes that other deeper and more meaningful journey that we are called to follow and which leads to our encounter with God. Travelling, which offers us the possibility of admiring the beauty of peoples, cultures and nature, can lead to God and be the occasion of an experience of faith, “for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (*Wis* 13:5). On the other hand tourism, like every human reality, is not exempt from dangers or negative dimensions. We refer to evils that must be dealt with urgently since they trample upon the rights of millions of men and women, especially among the poor, minors and handicapped. Sexual tourism is one of the most abject of these deviations that devastate morally, psychologically and physically the life of so many persons and families, and sometimes whole communities. The trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation or organ harvesting as well as the exploitation of minors, abandoned into the hands of individuals without scruples and undergoing abuse and torture, sadly happen often in the context of tourism. This should bring all who are engaged for pastoral reasons or who work

in the field of tourism, and the whole international community, to increase their vigilance and to foresee and oppose such aberrations.

In the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, I chose to situate the reality of international tourism in the context of integral human development. “We need, therefore, to develop a different type of tourism that has the ability to promote genuine mutual understanding, without taking away from the element of rest and healthy recreation” (no. 61). May your Congress, meeting precisely under the banner *A tourism that makes a difference*, contribute to the development of a pastoral approach that will lead steadily to that “different type of tourism”.

I would like to highlight three areas which should receive full attention from the pastoral care of tourism. Firstly, we need shed light on this reality using the social teaching of the Church and promote a culture of ethical and responsible tourism, in such a way that it will respect the dignity of persons and of peoples, be open to all, be just, sustainable and ecological. The enjoyment of free time and regular vacations are an opportunity as well as a right. The Church, within its own sphere of competence, is committed to continue offering its cooperation, so that this right will become a reality for all people, especially for less fortunate communities.

Secondly, our pastoral action should never lose sight of the *via pulchritudinis*, “the way of beauty”. Many of the manifestations of the historical and cultural religious patrimony are “authentic ways to God, Supreme Beauty; indeed they help us to grow in our relationship with him, in prayer. These are works that arise from faith and express faith” (*General Audience, 31 August 2011*). It is important to welcome tourists and offer them well-organized visits, with due respect for sacred places and the liturgical action, for which many of these works came into being and which continues to be their main purpose.

Thirdly, pastoral activity in the area of tourism should care for Christians as they enjoy their vacations and free time in such a way that these will contribute to their human and spiritual growth. Truly this is “an appropriate moment to let the body relax and to nourish the spirit with more time for prayer and meditation, in order to grow in personal relationship with Christ and become ever more conformed to his teachings” (*Angelus, 15 July 2007*).

The new evangelization, to which all are called, requires us to keep in mind and to make good use of the many occasions that tourism offers us to put forward Christ as the supreme response to modern man’s fundamental questions.

I therefore encourage you to ensure that pastoral activity in the field of tourism is integrated, as it ought in all justice, as part of the organic, ordinary pastoral activity of the Church. In this way, by the coordination of projects and efforts, we will respond in greater fidelity to the Lord’s missionary mandate.

With these sentiments, I entrust the fruits of this Congress to the powerful intercession of the Mary Most Holy under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe and, as a pledge of abundant divine favours, I cordially impart to all present the requested Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, April 18th 2012

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

<http://www.vatican.va>