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## POPE IDENTIFIES HIS MINISTRY AS THAT OF A PILGRIM

### Stresses Importance of Sacraments in Shrines

VATICAN CITY, SEPT. 27, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is likening his papal ministry to that of a pilgrim, who travels throughout the world bringing the good news of Christ to others.

The Pope stated this in a message addressed to the 2nd World Conference on the Pastoral Care of Pilgrimages and Shrines, which began today in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, and will end Thursday.

He acknowledged that King Juan Carlos I of Spain "has honored this initiative by accepting its honorary presidency." The Pontiff will meet with the king, as well as the queen, prince and princess, on his Nov. 6-7 apostolic trip to Spain.

In fact, the Holy Father noted in his message, "I will personally make a pilgrimage soon to the tomb of the Apostle St. James, the 'Lord's friend,' in the same way that I have made my way to other places in the world which many of the faithful visit with fervent devotion."

"In this regard," Benedict XVI continued, "from the beginning of my pontificate, I have wanted to live my ministry as the Successor of Peter with the sentiments of a pilgrim who travels over the roads of the world with hope and simplicity bringing on his lips and in his heart the saving message of the Risen Christ, and strengthening his brothers in faith."

"As an explicit sign of this mission," he added, "my coat-of-arms includes the pilgrim's shell, among other elements."

The Pope told those engaged in the pastoral care of pilgrims: "In these historic moments in which we are called, with greater force if possible, to evangelize our world, the riches offered to us by the pilgrimage to shrines should be highlighted."

He underlined "its great ability to summon and bring together a growing number of pilgrims and religious tourists, some of whom are in complicated human and spiritual situations, somewhat distant from living the faith and with a weak ecclesial affiliation."

"Christ speaks to all of them with love and hope," the Pontiff affirmed. "With his grace, the noblest causes also find their complete fulfillment."

## Sacred places

He noted that "efforts should be made so that visitors may not forget that shrines are sacred places in order to be in them with devotion, respect and propriety."

"In this way," the Holy Father explained, "the Word of Christ, the Son of the living God, can ring out clearly, and the event of his death and resurrection, the foundation of our faith, can be proclaimed completely."

He also stressed that "shrines should be lighthouses of charity, with unceasing dedication to the neediest through concrete works of solidarity and mercy, and constant readiness to listen, favoring in particular the faithful's reception of the sacrament of reconciliation and taking part worthily in the Eucharistic celebration, making this the center and apex of all the pastoral activity of the shrines."

"In this way it will be made manifest that the Eucharist is indeed the pilgrim's nourishment," Benedict XVI added.

"Different from a wanderer whose steps have no established final destination, a pilgrim always has a destination, even if at times he is not explicitly aware of it," the Pope observed.

He continued: "And this destination is none other than the encounter with God through Christ in whom all our aspirations find their response."

"For this reason, the celebration of the Eucharist can really be considered the culmination of the pilgrimage."

The Pontiff urged the conference participants: "As God's coworkers, I exhort all of you to be dedicated to this beautiful mission so that through your pastoral care, you will favor in pilgrims the knowledge and imitation of Christ who continues to walk with us, enlighten our lives with his Word, and share with us the Bread of Life in the Eucharist."

The first congress of this kind was held 18 years ago in Rome. This second gathering brought together some 300 participants from various countries worldwide.

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