

POPE BENEDICT XVI'S 2008 VISIT TO WASHINGTON



“Those who have hope must live different lives! (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 2). By your prayers, by the witness of your faith, by the fruitfulness of your charity, may you point the way toward that vast horizon of hope which God is even now opening up to his Church and indeed to all humanity: the vision of a world reconciled and renewed in Christ Jesus, our Savior. To him be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.”

Excerpt from the concluding words of Pope Benedict XVI's homily at Nationals Park

- In April 2008, Pope Benedict XVI made his first pastoral visit to the United States, first visiting Washington, D.C., from April 15-17, then traveling to New York, where he concluded his apostolic journey on April 20. The theme of the papal visit was “Christ Our Hope.”
- The highlight of Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Washington, D.C., came when he celebrated a Papal Mass on April 17 for nearly 50,000 people at the newly opened Nationals Park.
- Welcoming Pope Benedict XVI at the Papal Mass, Washington Cardinal Donald Wuerl said the crowd at the park represented the face of the Catholic Church in the United States: “The Church that welcomes Your Holiness embraces people from every continent and numerous ethnic and cultural backgrounds. All of us at this Mass reflect the breadth of this faith family that includes women and men, young and old.”
- After his “Shepherd One” plane touched down at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, Pope Benedict XVI was greeted by dignitaries including President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush, along with Cardinal Wuerl and other Catholic leaders. The next day, President Bush and the first lady welcomed Pope Benedict to the White House. The pontiff said he had come to America “as a friend, (and) a preacher of the Gospel.”
- Also during his Washington visit, Pope Benedict prayed evening vespers with U.S. bishops at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception; addressed national Catholic educational leaders at The Catholic University of America; and participated in an ecumenical prayer service at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center (now the Saint John Paul II National Shrine). Joyful crowds greeted the pope-mobile as it traveled Washington’s streets.
- Pope Benedict XVI stayed at the Apostolic Nunciature during his visit to Washington, and he was hosted by Archbishop Pietro Sambi, then the apostolic nuncio to the United States. On the morning of April 16, Pope Benedict XVI’s 81st birthday, the pontiff stepped out of the nunciature’s front door and was greeted by students from nearby Annunciation School in Washington, who sang “Happy Birthday” to him in his native German and in English.

- After celebrating Mass at Nationals Park, Pope Benedict XVI met privately with a small group of survivors of priest sexual abuse, and he listened to their stories and prayed with them in the nunciature's chapel.
- To commemorate the papal visit, Catholics at parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Washington collected 112 tons of food in Catholic Charities' Hunger to Hope drive honoring the pope.
- During his visit to New York, Pope Benedict XVI prayed at Ground Zero, addressed the United Nations, celebrated Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral and Yankee Stadium; participated in a rally for seminarians and young people at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y.; visited a New York synagogue; and participated in an ecumenical prayer service at the Church of St. Joseph in New York.