

Vatican Confirms: Pope Will Visit Brazil in May

Contributed by Elma Lia Nascimento
Friday, 27 October 2006

Pope Benedict XVI will visit Brazil in May 2007. The news was confirmed by the CNBB (National Conference of the Bishops of Brazil) during a press conference this Thursday, October 26.

The CNBB still does not have the schedule of the trip, but has already warned that he will not go to as many Brazilian cities as his predecessor John Paul II did. The main focus of the pope's visit will be the sanctuary of Aparecida do Norte, located between Rio and São Paulo.

The pontiff will celebrate mass in Aparecida on May 13, at the opening of the 5th General Conference of the CELAM (Latin-American Episcopal Council). The whole schedule will not be released before January.

Before December, Aparecida should be visited by a committee comprised by Vatican, CNBB and CELAM representatives, which will define all the details of the pope's trip.

Aparecida's archbishop, Dom Raymundo Damasceno de Assis, said that the pope's envoy will still discuss with him several details like security plans, how many people are expected, how long the pontiff will stay, and what places he will visit.

Cardinal Dom Cláudio Hummes, São Paulo's metropolitan archbishop, informed that the pope will also visit the city of São Paulo during his stay in Brazil.

According to Hummes, while the pontiff is coming for the opening of the 5th General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate to be held in Aparecida, 100 miles from São Paulo, his plane will land in São Paulo. While Benedict XVI will be lodged in São Paulo, his schedule in the city hasn't been defined yet.

The pope might visit other cities like Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, but this will depend on the pontiff himself and his handlers. Federal and state authorities say they will wait more defined plans for the trip before they start their own security plans.

Church authorities are expecting that at least half a million people will come to Aparecida to welcome the pope and they suggest that as many as one million might be at hand when the pope celebrates mass at the Aparecida national sanctuary.

Aparecida receives 8 million pilgrims a year. The Aparecida's Basilica is the second largest church in the world being surpassed only by the Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. Aparecida is also considered the world's largest center for pilgrimage of the Virgin Mary's devotees.

The president and the vice president of the CNBB, Cardinal Geraldo Majella Agnelo and bishop Antonio Celso of Queirós, used the same press conference in which they announce the pope's trip to criticize the Lula administration's social policies:

"There is no doubt that the PT and Lula distanced themselves from the social movements. In the last four years, the economy was treated the same way as in the preceding government," said Dom Queirós.

He also criticized the TV debates where Lula and his opponent Geraldo Alckmin appeared: "I don't waste my time watching them. There was no discussion about what we wanted, about what we think really matters for the people. All they had was bickering. The level of debates was very poor."

Dom Agnelo wasn't less critical: "Lula and Alckmin keep arguing who is more or less ethical. They only forget that being ethical is the obligation of every politician."