

## Pope Starts Brazil Trip Condemning Abortion and Euthanasia

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In his first speech at the start of his Brazilian trip, Pope Benedict XVI talked in Portuguese and despite the heavy accent showed to have a good command of the language. "It is a particular satisfaction to start my pastoral visit to Brazil," said the pontiff.

"I know that the soul of this people and of Latin America hold on their Christian values. I am very happy to spend some days in Brazil. I feel a feeling of fondness and love coming from the people, as an echo."

Brazil has a very special place in his heart, he told those who went to welcome him at Cumbica, the São Paulo International airport. He thanked the welcome and reminded his hosts that the main reason of his visit is to participate in the Latin American and the Caribbean Episcopal Conference to be held in the city of Aparecida do Norte in the interior of São Paulo.

The pope also used his first contact with Brazilians to reaffirm his belief that life must be valued and respected "from conception to its natural decline." This puts him in a collision course with all those in Brazil and around the world who defend abortion, embryo research and euthanasia.

In his welcome speech, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva talked about being filled with joy: "As a Christian and the president I'm very much honored," said Lula. "The country receives the Pope with open arms because it expects a lot from his spiritual and moral leadership."

Lula also stressed the importance of the Church for the spiritual, moral and social elevation of the Brazilian people, especially with regard to the poor. "We share," he told the pope, "the rescue of the family life, the authentic community and social life".

Earlier, talking to reporters aboard his plane on his way to Brazil Benedict XVI said he supports the excommunication of politicians who legalize abortion.

The pope was discussing a recent vote by lawmakers to legalize abortion in Mexico City. Pope Benedict said the local Catholic leaders' response, that lawmakers who approved the measure should be excommunicated, is supported by church doctrine.

During his visit to Brazil, the pontiff is expected to canonize the first native-born Brazilian saint and take part in Sunday's opening of a Latin American bishops' conference.

South America is home to about half of the world's Roman Catholics, but numbers of the faithful have decreased in recent years.