

Pope Pans in Brazil Media and Aggressive Proselytism of Evangelical Sects

Contributed by José Wilson Miranda
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World's most catholic country finally got its own saint. Pope Benedict XVI canonized, Friday, May 11, in Brazil, that country's first saint, the Franciscan friar Antonio de Sant'Anna Galvão who lived between 1739 and 1822.

The pope was warmly applauded by a crowd of about 800,000 people who went to the open air ceremony at Campo de Marte, in the north side of São Paulo. About half of the 1.5 million that were being expected by the Church's authorities.

The gates to Campo de Marte were opened at one in the morning. At that time about 10,000 people were already outside the entrance waiting to get in. At six, the crowd had grown to half a million people, according to police estimates.

Among those present were about 400 descendants of Friar Galvão's relatives. They came in ten buses from Guaratinguetá, a town in the interior of São Paulo and stayed in a reserved area. One of the family members, Cecília Leite Galvão, told reporters: "Brazil's life is going to change with the new Brazilian saint. Brazil's power is tremendous."

The just-consecrated new archbishop of São Paulo, Odilo Scherer, opened the canonization ceremonies welcoming Benedict XVI. The religious service had traditional Catholic songs and people also sang the tune composed especially for the pope's visit.

The mass started with a reading on the life of the new saint, a religious who lived in São Paulo. The prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, José Saraiva Martins, and archbishop Odilo made the formal request so that Friar Galvão could be canonized.

Friar Galvão was beatified in October 1998 by pope João Paulo II. But it was only last December that the Vatican sanctioned the first miracle attributed to him, the cure of a four-year-old girl.

Addressing the crowd the pope stated his love to all the faithful present at the canonization ceremony. "Rest assured that the pope loves you. And he loves you because Christ loves you," he intoned. To which the people screamed in chorus, "Pope, I love you. Pope, I love you."

In his sermon, in Portuguese, during the mass, the pontiff stated that it is necessary "to say no to those social communication media that ridicule the sanctity of matrimony and virginity before marriage.

On the other hand, the pope praised the example given by the new saint, Friar Galvão. "Our saint dedicated his own life in an irrevocable manner. What a beautiful example friar Galvão gave us. How do they sound modern for us who are living in a time filled with hedonism," he said. He still called the saint "zealous, wise and prudent."

According to the pontiff, the world today lives under the yoke of hedonism and the Catholic faithful must move, amidst the contemporary challenges, through their "loyalty to God within or outside of marriage." "The world needs clean lives, clear souls, simple intellects that refuse to be considered objects of pleasure," he added.

On Thursday, May 10, the pope had conveyed a similar message, when talking to a crowd of over 40,000 youngsters gathered at the Pacaembu soccer stadium. At that time, Benedict XVI urged the faithful to practice chastity within and outside of wedlock.

Air Force, Army, federal and military police as well as civilian police took part in the security apparatus. There were also 28 emergency medical stations, 43 ambulances, five centers to assist lost children and seven military police stations.

Talking later in the day in front of an audience of about 400 bishops gathered at Sé cathedral, in old downtown São Paulo, the pope expressed his concern about the exodus of the faithful from the Catholic church.

For him the biggest culprit for this situation are the men of the Church who haven't shown enough determination to preach the Gospel. The answer, he said, rests in keeping faithful to conservative principles and not in reforming movements inside the church, a clear condemnation of Liberation Theology.

And he didn't spare other Christian denominations calling them sects: "Among the problems that strain your pastoral solicitude is, without a doubt, the matter of Catholics who abandon the Church... "The baptized are not sufficiently evangelized," he said, and therefore are unable to resist "the sects' aggressive proselytism" in a reference to the growth of evangelical churches in Brazil.