

Pope: Gypsy Children Entitled to a Better Life

Addresses Pilgrim Group Commemorating Blessed Ceferino

ROME, JUNE 13, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI says Gypsy children are entitled to a better life, as he urged them to fit their families into the civil fabric of Europe with dignity.

The Pope said this when he addressed a crowd of more than 2,000 Gypsies who had welcomed him to Paul VI Hall on Saturday with cheers, waving white and yellow flags.

A group of Gypsy children performed a dance, and the Holy Father spoke of the culture these peoples have created. He said their music and song have "enriched Europe."

The Gypsies were in Rome for a continent-wide pilgrimage, organized by the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, which marked the 150th anniversary of birth and the 75th anniversary of martyrdom of Blessed Ceferino Giménez Malla. Blessed Ceferino was the first Gypsy to be raised to the altar; he died a martyr in Spain, arrested for defending a priest and for possessing a rosary.

The Holy Father thus spoke of him as an "authentic 'martyr of the rosary,' because he did not let anyone take the rosary from him, not even when he was at the point of death."

"Today Blessed Ceferino invites us to follow his example and shows us the way: dedication to prayer and in particular to the rosary, love for the Eucharist and for the other sacraments, the observance of the commandments, honesty, charity and generosity to our neighbor, especially the poor; all this will strengthen you in the face of the risk that sects may endanger your communion with the Church," the Bishop of Rome said.

Heart of the Church

Benedict XVI quoted his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, in assuring the Gypsies that they are "in the heart of the Church."

"Today too I repeat with affection: you are in the Church! You are a beloved portion of the pilgrim People of God and remind us that here 'we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come,'" the Pope said.

But he acknowledged that the history of the Gypsy peoples is "complex and in some periods, painful."

He noted how in past centuries, they did not aspire to possess land or dominate other peoples, but how they were left without a homeland, and "considered the entire continent your home."

"Serious and disturbing problems persist," the Pontiff lamented, "such as the frequently difficult relations you have with the societies in which you live."

He noted the "bitterness of inhospitality" that Gypsies have known through the centuries, particularly during World War II when "thousands of women, men and children were barbarously killed in extermination camps."

"As you say, it was the Porráimos, the 'Great Devouring,' a tragedy still little known and whose proportions are difficult to gauge, but which your families bear impressed on their hearts," the Pope said.

"The European conscience cannot forget so much suffering," he declared. "May your people never again be the object of harassment, rejection and contempt! On your part, always seek justice, legality, reconciliation and do your utmost never to be the cause of others' suffering!"

Changing times

Benedict XVI said that today, the situation is changing as new opportunities become available and many races of the Gypsy peoples are seeking stability.

"The Church walks with you and invites you to live in accordance with the demanding requirements of the Gospel, trusting in the power of Christ, towards a better future," the Holy Father assured.

"I ask you, dear friends, to write together a new page of history for your people and for Europe," he said.

The Pontiff proposed that housing, education and dignified work are the foundations on which to build an integration that will benefit both Gypsies and the European society.

"You too offer your effective and loyal collaboration so that your families may fit into the civil fabric of Europe with dignity," he said. "Many of your children and your young people wish to be educated and to live with and like others. I see them with special affection, convinced that your children are entitled to a better life. May their good be your greatest aspiration! Preserve the dignity and value of your families, little domestic churches, so that they may be true schools of humanity."

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