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FORGIVENESS DOES NOT REPLACE JUSTICE, SAYS POPE

States Church

By Jesús Colina

LISBON, Portugal, MAY 11, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI says the greatest persecution that the Church endures comes from the sins of her own children.

The Pope said this today en route to Portugal, in response to a question about the sufferings the Church endures today in the midst of the sex abuse scandal.

On board Alitalia's Airbus 320, at the start of his 15th international trip, the Holy Father was asked if it is possible to see in the Fatima message -- in addition to a reference to the attack on John Paul II -- an allusion to the sufferings that the Church is going through today.

Benedict XVI replied that what can be discovered again today in Our Lady's message from Fatima is the "passion" that the Church is experiencing, and that "is reflected in the person of the Pope."

"The attacks on the Pope and the Church do not just come from outside, but the sufferings of the Church come precisely from within the Church, from the sin that is in the Church," he said. "This has always been known, but today we see it in a really terrifying way: The greatest persecution of the Church does not come from external enemies, but is born from the sin in the Church.

"And the Church, therefore, has the profound need to learn penance again, to accept purification, to learn on one hand forgiveness, as well as the need for justice. Forgiveness does not replace justice."

Still, the Pope confirmed that "the Lord is stronger than evil and the Virgin is, for us, the visible, maternal guarantee of the goodness of God, who is always the last word in history."

Faith and reason

Earlier, the Bishop of Rome answered a question on the secularization in Portugal, despite the country's strong Catholic history.

Benedict XVI affirmed first of all that throughout the centuries, there has been a "courageous, intelligent and creative faith," in the Portuguese nation, spreading to many parts of the world, as in Brazil.

Acknowledging at the same time that "the dialectic between faith and secularization in Portugal" has "a long history," he recalled that there have been numerous persons who've been able to "create bridges" -- "to create a dialogue" between the two positions.

"I think that, precisely, the task, the mission of Europe in this situation, is to find this dialogue, to integrate faith and modern rationality in an anthropological vision that gives plenitude to the human being," he answered.

"The presence of secularization is something normal, but the separation, the opposition between secularism and the culture of faith is anomalous and must be surmounted," the Pontiff contended. "The great challenge of this moment is that the two meet, and in this way find their true identity. It is a mission of Europe and a human need of our history."

Economic crisis

Benedict XVI also answered a question on the economic crisis, which could endanger, some think, the very stability of the European Union.

Stressing the social doctrine of the Church, the Pope admitted that the Catholic faith has "frequently" neglected the economic issues of the world, thinking only "of individual salvation."

"The whole tradition of the social doctrine of the Church seeks to enlarge the ethical aspect and the aspect of faith, beyond the individual, until reaching the responsibility of the world, a rationality 'conformed' by ethics," he explained. "And, moreover, the latest events in the market of these last two or three years have demonstrated that the ethical dimension is internal and must penetrate economic action."

"Only in this way," he concluded, "does Europe realize its mission."