

Pope urges compassion for refugees from conflict

by [Eric J. Lyman](#)

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Vatican City, April 25 (ENInews)--Pope Benedict XVI on Easter Sunday called for an end to violence in Libya and the Ivory Coast and he prayed for the victims of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami, as Holy Week drew to a close and preparations for the beatification of the late Pope John Paul II started to ramp up.

Benedict spoke from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica with an estimated 100,000 faithful on hand amid bright spring flowers set up around St. Peter's Square and unusually tight security from Italian law enforcement -- both of which are expected to be in evidence on 1 May at John Paul II's beatification Mass.

As has been the case in recent years, Benedict called attention to international conflicts, urging diplomacy instead of violence in war-torn Libya and calling for "people of good will" to open their hearts to welcome refugees of that conflict as well as from Ivory Coast and other parts of Africa and in the Middle East.

"In the current conflict in Libya, may diplomacy and dialogue replace arms and may those who suffer be given access to humanitarian aid," Benedict said. "In the Middle East, may the light of peace and human dignity overcome the darkness of division, hate, and violence."

Benedict called attention to the "pain and anguish" of citizens of Japan affected by the recent earthquake and tsunami and other places he said had been "tested" by natural disasters. He also prayed for those persecuted for their Christian faith -- an apparent nod toward China, where house churches have reportedly come under attack in recent days -- and he praised the courage of the faithful in those places.

In his "urbi et orbi" (to the City of Rome and to the world) blessing, Benedict said the resurrection of Christ celebrated on Easter should not be viewed as "a mystical experience" but rather an event relevant today that gives new hope and new

meaning to life. In a tradition started by John Paul II, he also offered Easter greetings to the worldwide television audience, estimated in the tens of millions, in different languages, including Swahili, Hindi, Mandarin, and Esperanto.

"At such an important point in world history with so much conflict and suffering around the world, I think it is very important to have the guidance and the wisdom of Benedict to inspire us," said Maria Angela Seppi, a 40-year-old schoolteacher from the Italian region of Abruzzo, who came to Rome for the Easter Mass.

Harold Reese, 70, a retired caterer from Philadelphia in Italy on vacation, agreed: "After listening to the pope's words, you realize the church's role in the world is as important as ever," he said.

With the close of Holy Week, the Vatican will now focus on the events surrounding John Paul II's beatification, which will get underway 30 April with a prayer vigil. Vatican officials have said they expect "at least" 300,000 people to come to Rome, but Italian law enforcement officials said on 22 April that they were prepared for more than three times that number.

Signs with John Paul's image and the schedule for the beatification are in evidence all over Rome -- in shop windows, on walls and buses -- and Italian newspapers are reporting the city's hotels are nearly fully booked.