

Pope arrives in Cuba, blasts economic 'selfishness'

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Benedict XVI arrived in Cuba on Monday (March 26), renewing the Catholic Church's pledge to "work tirelessly to better serve all Cubans" as the island strives to "renew and broaden its horizons."

Benedict landed in Santiago de Cuba, east of Havana, arriving from Mexico for the second leg of his weeklong visit to Latin America. President Raul Castro came to personally greet the German pope before Benedict was scheduled to celebrate Mass in the city's Revolution Square.

In his speech during the airport welcome ceremony, Benedict said he carried with him "the just aspirations and legitimate desires of all Cubans," including those of "prisoners and their families."

On the eve of the pope's arrival, dissidents denounced a wave of arrests against political opponents. Despite repeated requests, Vatican officials have said that there is little chance that Benedict will meet with representatives from the protest group Damas de Blanco (Women in White) during his three-day visit.

Benedict praised the revived "cooperation and trust" between the church and Cuba's communist government, but noted there are still areas "in which greater progress can and ought to be made," especially regarding the church's contribution to public life.

But the pontiff also struck a note that was likely to resonate with his communist hosts, when he played up the moral roots of the global economic crisis.

Benedict said the "ambition and selfishness of certain powers" took "little account of the true good of individuals and families," and added that it was impossible to "continue in the same cultural and moral direction which has caused the painful situation that many suffer."