

Current Affairs - Preparations already underway for Pope's autumn visit

[2009-07-15] By Christian Falvey

2009 is a year of big visits for the Czech Republic. After receiving the new American president Barack Obama in April, the country is now preparing for another extremely important visitor: His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, who will be making several stops in the country over three days in September.



Pope Benedict XVI, photo: CTK

The papal visit from September 26 to 28 will be the first for the new pope, and preparations are already in full swing. Much of the programme has been especially planned by the pontiff himself and he plans to visit the country's main pilgrimage sites and other sites of particular interest to him. Karel Štícha is from the office coordinating Pope Benedict's visit:

"The pope will visit two important cities in the CR, first he will celebrate holy mass in Brno, which is the capital of Moravia, and then he will visit Stará Boleslav, a well-known city in Central Bohemia, and in this city on the day of St. Wenceslas he will celebrate a mass for the people from the region."



Stará Boleslav

Stará Boleslav is of huge significance to Czech Catholics as it marks the site where the patron St. Václav, a.k.a. Good King Wenceslas, was murdered by his younger brother and martyred. This stop on Pope Benedict's tour of the country will be a major event, with 30,000 people tentatively expected, and

thus a lot of the planning is focused on international transit to and from Stará Boleslav, as well as on many other areas.

"We are in the process of negotiation with the companies that are able to construct the structures necessary to prepare for holy mass and we are also in the process of negotiating with the state authorities about cooperation on infrastructure and the logistical preparations and so on."



The Church of Our Lady Victorious in Prague

Prague, of course, will not be off the Holy Father's list of things to see, and here too he has requested a special stop at the Church of Our Lady Victorious which houses the Child of Prague, a statue of the infant Christ that is revered around the world. Father Petr Šleich heads the Carmelite Priory of the Infant Jesus of Prague.

"It's not an honour for the Infant Jesus of Prague to be visited by the Holy Father, but in this special case it's an honour for the Holy Father to visit the little Jesus in this place which is so widely known and beloved by so many faithful on every continent today, and for centuries already. I think it is a great encouragement for all those Christian people in many countries who love this image of the little Jesus, they can see that the Church really appreciates their devotion, their trust in the little Jesus, and that they are not alone in this, that even the Pope himself shares their attitude."

The Czech Republic is a famously non-religious country, with 59% of the population is agnostic, atheist or non-denominational. Nonetheless, the roughly 2.5 million Catholics in the country are doubtless to be joined this autumn by their

brethren from the neighbouring Catholic bastions of Slovakia and Poland and the pope's homeland of Germany, and the papal visit to the Czech Republic is sure to be a big one.