

Pope calls for end to 'useless slaughter' of war

LORENZAGO DI CADORE, Italy – Pope Benedict XVI called for an end to the “useless slaughter” of war and asked that “the rule of law” replace the recourse to weapons.

When people succumb “to the temptations of evil” and launch violent conflicts and wars, “this stupendous garden that is the world” is opened up to hell, he said.

The pope made his appeal for peace July 22 before reciting the noonday Angelus prayer with thousands of pilgrims gathered in the main square of this northeastern Italian town nestled in the Dolomite Alps, where the pope is spending his July 9-27 vacation.

The peace and tranquillity of this Alpine region has sharpened “the painful impact of the news I receive about the bloody conflicts and violent events happening in many parts of the world,” he said.

“The beauty of nature reminds us that we were told by God to cultivate and care for this garden that is the earth. If humanity lived in peace with God and each other, the earth would really look like a paradise,” he said.

War, which leaves “grief and destruction in its wake, has always been rightly considered a calamity that clashes with God’s plan” of giving life and making humankind one family, the pope said.

Pope Benedict recalled the “appalling conflict” of World War I which raged in the mountains between Italy and Austria. He noted that, in an August 1917 address, Pope Benedict XV appealed to “the heads of warring peoples” to end this “useless slaughter.”

Pope Benedict XV condemned not only the war, the pope said, but showed the way leaders could build “a just and lasting peace” based on “the moral force of law, balanced and verified disarmament,” fair negotiations and the restitution of occupied lands.

“These events must not be forgotten,” Pope Benedict XVI said, so that “the negative experiences which our fathers unfortunately had to suffer” may never happen again. Echoing Popes Paul VI and John Paul II’s calls of “War never again,” Pope Benedict condemned as “unacceptable the horrors of useless slaughters.”

"I renew the appeal to tenaciously pursue the rule of law, to resolutely refute any recourse to arms, and to reject more widely the temptation of confronting new situations with old systems," he said.

After the Angelus prayer, the pope greeted Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong who was among some 6,000 pilgrims in the square. The cardinal, who often speaks out against the unjust treatment of Catholics in China, came with about 60 pilgrims.

On July 21, the pope was treated to an evening concert featuring seven local choirs. Bishop Giuseppe Andrich of Belluno-Feltre organized the event in the pope's honor. At the end of the concert, the pope said singing "is the expression of love" and that singing in a choir not only exercises one's ability to hear others' voices, but also fosters listening to one's heart.

"Singing in a choir is an education in life, an education in peace," he said.