

Pope says it was 'joy' to witness faith of U.S. Catholics

BROOKLYN, N.Y. – Thanking Americans for their hospitality, Pope Benedict XVI departed the United States amid a cheering crowd of 4,000 people who had come to see him off.

"It has been a joy for me to witness the faith and devotion of the Catholic community here," the pope said April 20 in brief remarks to those gathered in hangar 19 at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

"It was heartwarming to spend time with leaders and representatives of other Christian communities and other religions," Pope Benedict added.

Among those present were Cardinal Edward M. Egan of New York; Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre; and Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, whose diocese includes the airport. Also in attendance were New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg; Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D.-N.Y., and her husband, former President Bill Clinton; and Vice President Dick Cheney and his wife, Lynne.

"It has been a memorable week, and Pope Benedict XVI has stepped into the history of our country in a special way," Mr. Cheney said.

"You've encountered a nation facing many challenges, but with more blessings than any of us could number," he said. "You have seen a country where the torch of freedom, equality and tolerance will always be held high, a country where you – a herald of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – will always be welcome."

The pope said that one of the high points of his six-day trip to Washington and New York was visiting the United Nations on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document he discussed in his April 18 address to the General Assembly.

He also specifically mentioned his April 20 prayer at ground zero, saying it "will remain firmly etched in my memory."

A three-hour program of music and prayer reflecting the diverse ethnic makeup of the Brooklyn Diocese preceded the papal entourage's arrival around 8 p.m.

Participants recited the rosary in English, Polish, Italian, Tagalog and Korean. Attendees were encouraged to come in colorful costumes. Embroidered Guatemalan blouses and striped Polish circle skirts mixed with military uniforms and the elegant capes and feathered hats of the Knights of Columbus.

"It's great to have the opportunity to come see him," said Linda Amasiani, 42, of the Brooklyn Diocese Nigerian Apostolate. "He's reaching all religious groups and ethnicities."

Four elementary school-age children whose families are from Ecuador, Germany, Trinidad and Korea presented Pope Benedict with a replica of a stained-glass window from the Cathedral Basilica of St. James in Brooklyn.