



AMERICA/CUBA - "The expectation that I hear in all the Christian communities for the arrival of Benedict XVI is the same as 14 years ago, for John Paul II's visit," says Fr. Raul Rodriguez

Havana (Agenzia Fides) - "Hopefully it is a time of blessing of the Lord for these people, who need the saving and liberating message of Jesus. Let us hope it is a moment of unity among all Cubans, wherever they are, wherever they live, as happened during the Blessed John Paul II's visit" These are the expectations for Benedict XVI's visit in Cuba, expressed to Fides by Father Raul Rodriguez, a former National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in Cuba

"The Pope John Paul II's visit allowed the church to begin a new route. It was and continues to be a time of blessing - continues Fr. Rodriguez -. The result of his visit remains a nice mark on the trail of the history of Cuba and in the hearts of many Cubans. They were unforgettable days. In the city of Santa Clara, where he celebrated his first Mass, a monument to the 'Pilgrim of truth and hope' was erected. I often go to pray in that place and remember the message that John Paul II left the Cuban family, encouraging them to live in love and not to lose hope".

"The changes happen little by little, because we need to change attitudes, not only situations - continues Fr. Rodriguez -. The Church is called to evangelize and therefore needs specific areas within society. From Pope John Paul II's visit, we began a journey that is producing fruit, but we must continue to walk and, most importantly, continue to search for new spaces. For the Church in Cuba to be able to fulfill its mission it needs, for example, a greater presence in the media, the possibility to build churches in places where there is not an active presence in the formation of new generations ... This new road will be carried out with respect, bearing in mind that one cannot overcome all the problems on the same day, but it takes time".

Describing the atmosphere for Pope Benedict XVI's arrival, Father Raul Rodriguez says: "The expectation that I live and feel in all Christian communities, where I am the parish priest, for Benedict XVI's visit, is the same as 14 years ago, when we prepared to welcome Pope John Paul II: a moment of blessing for these people who have great need of the Gospel and the love of Christ. As the Bishops say in their message for the Year of Jubilee in which we live, 'may it become an opportunity for the Church to move forward in its mission of evangelization and continue to find new spaces to live its mission'."(CE) (Agenzia Fides 22/3/2012)