

Pope urges families to persevere in economic crisis

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ROME, April 7 — Pope Benedict called for perseverance in the face of an economic crisis that has led to hardship and rising unemployment across Europe as he presided over a procession around Rome's Colosseum to mark Jesus Christ's crucifixion and death on Good Friday.

The German pontiff, who turns 85 this month, stood before thousands of people holding candles at the traditional Via Crucis (Way of the Cross) march and listened to reflections on family unity that lamented divorce, abortion and infidelity.

Families from Italy, Ireland, Burkina Faso and Peru took turns carrying a cross around the ancient site associated with early Christian martyrs in one of the main services before Easter, the climax of the Christian year.

"The situation of many families is made worse by the threat of unemployment and other negative effects of the economic crisis," the pope said.

"At times of trouble, when our families have to face pain and adversity, let us look to Christ's cross. There we can find the courage and the strength to press on."

The economic crisis has led to increasing poverty and hardship in Europe and countries such as Greece and Italy have seen a wave of suicides in recent weeks linked to financial woes such as unemployment and companies going bankrupt.

Wearing a red cape, the pontiff listened to 14 meditations composed by elderly married couple Danilo and Anna Maria Zanzucchi, founders of a Christian movement that emphasises unity and commitment within the family.

The couple, who have been married for almost 60 years, lamented the breakdown of families within their texts for the "Stations of the Cross" that mark the suffering Jesus endured leading up to his death.

"How frequently do we fall in our families! How many separations, how many betrayals! And divorces, abortions, desertions!" they said in one meditation.

The torch-lit procession was the second event on Good Friday for the pope. He also presided over a service in St Peter's Basilica to mark the most solemn day in the Christian calendar.

On Thursday, he restated the Roman Catholic Church's ban on women priests and warned that he would not tolerate disobedience by clerics on fundamental teachings.

The pope, who looked tired during services yesterday, returned last week from a gruelling trip to Mexico and Cuba.

His brother, Reverend Georg Ratzinger, said during an interview with the German Catholic news agency KNA on Wednesday he thought the pontiff would cut back his foreign voyages

because travel increasingly wore him out.

Benedict will say an Easter Eve mass today, and will deliver an “Urbi et Orbi” (to the city and the world) blessing and message tomorrow. — Reuters

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