

Pope, in Spain, Laments Hedonism, Greedy Economy

VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Benedict XVI lamented the “superficiality, consumerism and hedonism” of contemporary society on Thursday (Aug. 18), while offering a message of Christian hope to young Catholic pilgrims gathered in Madrid.

Benedict made his remarks upon landing at the Madrid airport for the start of a four-day visit, during which he will take part in Catholic World Youth Day (WYD) celebrations that are expected to draw some 500,000 young people.

The pope said WYD participants have seen the need for divine help in facing challenges such as a “widespread banalization of sexuality,” corruption, drug use, environmental pollution and the persecution of Christians.

Arriving in a country with an unemployment rate of more than 20 percent, the pope also acknowledged economic concerns, noting that “many young people look worriedly to the future, as they search for work, or because they have lost their job or because the one they have is precarious or uncertain.”

Earlier the same morning, speaking to reporters on his plane from Rome, Benedict said ethics must play a greater role in economic policy, which must be measured not only “by the maximization of profit but according to the common good.”

On Wednesday night, thousands in Madrid protested the pope’s visit, citing what they said was its excessive cost to the Spanish public. Police arrested eight and reported 11 injured in related clashes.