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Pope calls Africa an 'immense spiritual lung'

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 5, 2009

Bishops attend the opening session of the Synod of Bishops for Africa in the synod hall at the Vatican Oct. 5. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Rome

Here's something you don?t see every day: St. Peter's Basilica, typically a showcase for traditional and sober forms of Catholic worship, rocking to the beat of bongo drums and bass guitars, as a Congolese chorus belted out catchy African hymns such as "Nakoma Peto" and "Yamba Makabu."

Such was the scene in St. Peter?s Sunday morning, during an opening Mass for the second Synod of Bishops for Africa, which is set to run Oct. 4-25 in Rome.

Pope Benedict XVI led Sunday?s liturgy, joined by almost 240 bishops, most of them Africans taking part in the synod. Concelebrating the Mass were the three co-presidents of the synod, Cardinals Francis Arinze of Nigeria, Wilfrid Fox Napier of South Africa, and Theodore-Adrien Sarr of Senegal, along with Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, the ?relator,? or general secretary, of the synod.

If the musical tone was upbeat, Pope Benedict struck a more sober note in his homily this morning. The pope praised the dynamism of the faith in Africa, where the Catholic population grew during the second half of the twentieth century by some 7,000 percent, soaring from 1.9 million Catholics to an estimated 160 million today.

The pope called Africa "an immense spiritual 'lung,' for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope." Later, during his midday Angelus address, Benedict praised the "extraordinary human wealth" of Africa.

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