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In impromptu synod meditation, pope cites threat of 'false gods'

by John Thavis by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Before the speech-giving began at the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East, Pope Benedict XVI offered participants an unusual reflection on the threat of "false gods" that beset the modern world.

After leading prayers in the synod hall the morning of Oct. 11, the pope spoke off-the-cuff for about 20 minutes about the meaning of the psalms that were chanted by the 185 synod fathers. He traced humanity's historical move away from polytheism and focused on the meaning of Christ's entry into human history.

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But he said the modern world is still threatened by an array of destructive powers based on "false divinities that must be unmasked." These include the ideology of terrorism that purports to act in the name of God, drug abuse that devours human lives like a beast, as well as a widespread view of marriage that no longer values the virtue of chastity, he said.

They also include the "anonymous" economic interests that, instead of belonging to man, enslave and even massacre people, he said.

He said the battle against such forces is part of a constant struggle for the church and for the faith. The Book of Revelation, he said, sheds light on this struggle against false gods, particularly in its image of the serpent who creates a river to drown a woman in flight, and of the earth that swallows up the river.

"I think the river is easily interpreted as these currents that dominate everyone and that want to make the church and the faith disappear," he said. "And the earth that absorbs these currents is the faith of ordinary people, which doesn't allow itself to be overcome by this river."

"The faith of ordinary people is the true wisdom," he said.

The pope added that the climate change being experienced by humanity today is another type of threat, one evoked in the language of Psalm 82, which speaks of a time when "all the foundations of the earth are shaken."

"And today we see that with the climate problems, the foundations of the earth are threatened, threatened by our behavior," he said.

"These exterior foundations are shaken because the interior foundations are shaken -- the interior foundations of morality and religious values, of the right way of living according to the faith," he said.

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