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# Pope Calls for Peace and Celebrates Conversions



Christophe Simon/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images  
Pilgrims and tourists huddled in a rainy St. Peter's Square on Easter Sunday to hear the pope's message.

By IAN FISHER  
Published: March 24, 2008

VATICAN CITY — [Pope Benedict XVI](#) led prayers for peace on the holiest day of the Christian year at a rainy outdoor Mass here on Easter Sunday, exulting conversions to the faith hours after the [Vatican](#) highlighted the baptism of Italy's most prominent Muslim.



Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters  
Pope Benedict XVI delivered the benediction on Easter Sunday.

In a prayer before thousands of soaking pilgrims and tourists at St. Peter's Square, the pope noted that the disciples had spread the message of Christ's resurrection — celebrated Sunday — and as a result "thousands and thousands of persons converted to Christianity."

"This is a miracle, which renews itself even today," he said.

Days after [Osama bin Laden](#) issued a threat against Europe that included an accusation that the pope was involved in a "new Crusade" against Islam, Magdi Allam, an Egyptian-born writer protected by Italian bodyguards because of his criticism of radical Islam, was baptized by the pope Saturday night and received his first holy communion. The news about Mr. Allam, a secular Muslim who is married to a Catholic, was confirmed by a Vatican news release an hour before the baptism.

"It was the most beautiful day of my life," Mr. Allam, 55, a deputy editor at Italy's largest daily newspaper, Corriere della Sera, wrote Sunday in a column. "The miracle of the resurrection of Christ reverberated in my soul, freeing it from the shadows of a preaching where hate and intolerance toward he who is different, toward he who is condemned as an 'enemy,' prevailed over love and respect for your neighbor."

Mr. Allam said that he would take a new middle name, "Cristiano," Italian for Christian.

Easter culminates the busiest week of the year at the Vatican. Scores of Masses and ceremonies mark the period in which Jesus Christ was arrested, crucified and, two days later, resurrected.

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According to tradition, the 80-year-old pope prayed for peace in troubled parts of the world. He cited Darfur in Sudan, Somalia and “the tormented Middle East, especially the Holy Land, Iraq, Lebanon.” He also mentioned Tibet, a delicate issue for the Vatican, which is working to improve ties with China, amid unconfirmed reports of direct talks here last week between Chinese and Vatican officials.

“How often relations between individuals, between groups and between peoples are marked not by love but by selfishness, injustice, hatred and violence,” the pope said. “These are the scourges of humanity, open and festering in every corner of the planet, although they are often ignored and sometimes deliberately concealed; wounds that torture the souls and bodies of countless of our brothers and sisters.”

Though it was hard to hear him because of the sound of rain falling on umbrellas, the pope, under a canopy in front of St. Peter’s Basilica, delivered Easter greetings in 63 languages.

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