

Pope to make second trip to Africa

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Benedict XVI will make his second papal trip to Africa on Friday (Nov. 18), visiting the West African country of Benin for three days, where he is likely to address economic justice, peace-building and interfaith dialogue.

During Mass at a stadium in the city of Cotonou on Sunday, Benedict will present Catholic bishops from across Africa with an authoritative papal document about the church's efforts to promote "reconciliation, justice and peace."

The document is based on a three-week synod of African bishops held at the Vatican in October 2009. That meeting ended with an unusually strong official statement that blamed violent conflict in Africa on "greed for power and wealth at the expense of the people and nation," and called on political leaders to "clean the continent of corruption."

Benedict will also speak to Benin's political, religious, business and cultural leaders at the presidential palace in Cotonou on Saturday. The Rev. Federico Lombardi, the chief Vatican spokesman, said the speech will touch on issues of concern to all of Africa.

While Catholics make up little more than a quarter of Benin's population, the country has long been a regional hub of missionary work, Lombardi said. A seminary in the city of Ouidah, which Benedict will visit on Saturday, has been a source of priests for nearby countries, including Ghana, Nigeria and Niger.

Ouidah is also an international center for the indigenous religion of Vodoun, or Voodoo, which is practiced by more than 17 percent of Beninese. Catholicism's relationship with traditional African religions is of particular concern to Benedict, who has warned against the danger of melding faiths in non-Catholic cultures.

Late last month at the Vatican, Benedict lamented to bishops visiting from Angola and Sao Tome and Principe that African converts to Catholicism often persist in "practices that are incompatible with adherence to Christ," including the

"marginalization and even murder of children and elderly people, condemned by the false diktats of witchcraft."