

FABC IX PLENARY ASSEMBLY
MANILA, PHILIPPINES
10-16 August 2009

MESSAGE

We, the 117 participants – Catholic Bishops of Asia, together with the Papal Envoy, Francis Cardinal Arinze, Archbishop Robert Sarah, the Secretary of the Congregation of Evangelisation of Peoples and the fraternal delegates from other Conferences of Bishops (Australia, Canada, U.S.A, Spain and the Federation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Oceania), and FABC Offices and representatives of our funding partners (Missio, Misereor and Stichting Porticus), Christian Conference of Asia – gathered in Manila for the IX Plenary Assembly of the FABC (August 10 – 16). With great pastoral concern, we came together to celebrate, pray, reflect and discern, and to provide pastoral orientations and recommendations on the theme: “Living the Eucharist in Asia.”

Call to Community

The theme of the Plenary Assembly is of great importance for the entire Church in Asia, for our life and mission. Therefore, every effort must be made to have on-going reflection on its significance. This, we hope, will result in a new fervour to make the Eucharistic celebration first and foremost an encounter with Jesus, the Risen Lord, leading to communion. Active and prayerful participation by hearing the Word and sharing in the breaking of the Bread will lead us to that personal and intimate encounter.

In this sacrament, the God of unity comes to permeate and envelope our life – personal and societal, bringing the gift of union with him and with one another. We should also keep in mind that Asia cherishes family, common meal and community celebrations to foster and promote unity. The Eucharist, both sacrifice and meal, was first referred to as the “Supper of the Lord”, and then as the “breaking of the Bread”. These names express two important demands (dimensions): intimacy with Jesus and family-like union among those who share the bread. Our celebrations should generate in everyone the courage to build authentic communities that reconcile, forgive, minister to the poor and the marginalised.

Love made perfect in self-sacrifice by Jesus, and renewed in the Eucharist, calls forth nothing less than a life-style of sacrificial love. This alone can bring about true harmony and peace. Asia's soul thirsts for universal harmony. The Eucharist responds to this quest. Each and every Christian and every community must become what they celebrate: unity in diversity. St Paul shows the gift and the task that the Eucharist is in these memorable words: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). The Eucharist should indeed be the school where we grow in harmony and are empowered to promote it.

We can not celebrate the Eucharist and at the same time maintain, practice or tolerate discrimination based on religion or race, culture or language, caste or class. If we are

grafted into the Eucharistic Lord, we will reach out and become bridge-builders in a world that is becoming increasingly divisive.

The Call to hear the Word

To celebrate the Eucharist is **to live in faith**, a faith planted, nurtured and nourished by the Word. It demands that we become contemplative listeners and ponderers of the Word, like the Virgin Mary, our Mother. Our brothers and sisters of other religions in Asia have great devotion to their sacred books, and they chant and interiorize the Word. This culture of listening is a further invitation to become men and women who cherish and devote themselves to the Word and to the breaking of the bread. Such listening will certainly issue forth in living in the light of the Word. An ideal context where intense listening to the Word can take place is the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that dot the map of the Church in Asia. We remind all those who are entrusted with the ministry of animating the Eucharistic communities, especially priests, that they have a great responsibility to make the Eucharist a transforming event, by adequate preparation, and effective celebration, and in particular by relevant and nourishing homilies.

There should be devout listening to the Word every day at home as a family, especially on the eve of Sundays to prepare for the Eucharist by reading and praying the Word to be proclaimed on the Day of the Lord. Such a practice will certainly bear fruits of renewal of Christian life. It will bring about a culture of listening to the Word in our parishes and communities.

Call to faith and hope

We are pilgrims on earth, walking in lights and shadows, journeying with anxieties and uncertainties, pains and sufferings, oftentimes, imposed upon us. We cherish the Eucharist, for in it we receive the Word of life and light that opens our eyes and the Bread of life that warms up our hearts. The unity of the Word and Bread in the Eucharist invite us to treasure and live both these aspects.

Without this gift we would be just groping in the dark, walking through a tunnel without even a glimmer of hope. With both these gifts we shall discover, like the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13f), the deeper meaning and the divine call to hope in the midst of all that we go through in life: sudden economic chaos, increasing global warming, natural disasters, persecutions, untold sufferings of people every where, especially of women and children, refugees and of those deprived of freedom in different countries of Asia.

To those who experience life as meaningless and (worthless) not worth living, we must bring the memory of Jesus crucified and risen, the memory made alive in the Eucharist, a memory capable of healing the trauma of hopelessness. The Paschal mystery contains the power to interpret our life experiences. For in Jesus not only God is revealed, but also the meaning of our human life with all its richness and vulnerability. His Word can enlighten every experience we go through.

Call to mission

Asian celebrations are marked by joy, simplicity and participation. Asian heart is energised by **contemplating** beauty in nature. Our Eucharistic celebrations need to touch the hearts of Asians who love colour, flowers, symbols, music and contemplation. Asian symbols, Asian melodies, and even more Asian values, should make our celebrations create a resonance in the depths of Asia's heart. How great a witness of our faith - Christ has come not destroy but to perfect- would such a celebration of the Eucharist be! The appeal of Pope John Paul II to show forth the **Asian face of Jesus** to our brothers and sisters echoes afresh in our ears. (*Ecclesia in Asia*)

We are convinced that meaningful, contemplative, experiential and prayerful celebration of the Eucharist has the potential to render the Christian communities of Asia powerful witnesses of Jesus, witnesses who are bearers of his presence, his love, and his healing power. The celebration of the Eucharist end with the call to mission: "Go, you are sent forth." The Eucharist must be lived by becoming communities of loving concern, hospitality, selfless service to the poor, the excluded, and downtrodden. The breaking of the Bread must continue. That is the sign that we live the Eucharist (Jn 13:1-17).

Mary is the "woman of the Eucharist" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). To her, on the Feast of the Assumption, we entrusted the Church in Asia. May she accompany us in our commitment to live the Eucharist in Asia.