

Congress of Asian Catholic Laity
Seoul, Korea

August 31 to September 5, 2010

Message to the Catholic Laity of Asia

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

To all those who confess their faith in Jesus Christ Our Lord, Son of the Living God, and bear witness to Him in all of the different countries through this vast continent of Asia!

To you especially, our Catholic brothers and sisters, *Christifideles*, baptized in the Lord, sons and daughters of God the Father, anointed in the Holy Spirit, who are aware of the dignity and responsibility of our vocation as disciples, witnesses and missionaries.

To all of you we wish to express our profound sentiments of gratitude, joy and hope, which stems from our participation in this Congress of Asian Catholic Laity, held in Seoul, Korea from August 31 to September 5, 2010 under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and in collaboration with different sectors of the Catholic Church in Korea.

Among the four hundred people who participated in this significant event, were those who formed the delegations from the bishops' conferences of various Asian countries that were headed up by their respective bishops and priests, representatives from the Federation of Asia Bishops' Conferences, representatives from associations, ecclesial movement and new communities in Asia and numerous lay Catholics from Korea.

While enjoying an atmosphere of prayer, ecclesial communion and friendship, and guided by the theme of the Congress theme: "Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today", we were able to reflect on the present reality of our beloved continent at the light of the faith.

We have certainly felt accompanied by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI who has shown his paternal affection and closeness by his words of encouragement and guidance that he addressed to all of us in his letter to Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko in occasion of this Congress. In it, he expresses his hope that this Congress provide renewed encouragement in taking up this sacred mandate "of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, the universal Savior". Indeed, the Holy Father also notes that we have been entrusted with a "great mission" which is the "supreme service and greatest gift that the Church can offer to the people of Asia".

During these days, we have gained a renewed understanding of greatness and timeliness of this mission that stems from the grace of our Baptism and the personal and transforming encounter with Christ which, as in the case of St Paul, becomes a "source of sublime happiness and a gift to share with others" (cf. *Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to Card. Ryłko*). We know that we must allow

ourselves to be captivated by Christ, through the personal and communitarian encounters with Him; through the listening of His word, through the frequent reception of the sacraments, through frequent moments of prayer with Him in which we allow his grace to transform our hearts and touch all dimensions of our lives, making us holy in His sight. In this way, each one of us can respond to our divine vocation and become indispensable coworkers in the life of the Church and in making “new pathways for the gospel in society” (*ibid*).

We continue to be impressed by the witness given by so many lay Catholics, who, although being such a small minority in this continent, are actively engaged in the work of evangelization, sustained by the belonging to the communion of the Catholic Church, and encouraged by their conviction of being brothers and sisters with those who, while spread throughout the world, make up those billion of baptized Catholics, as well as the heroic testimonies of faith that have been bequeathed to us by brothers and sisters from our own continent who have gone before us and now form part of the communion of the saints.

We have been particularly edified by those who bear courageous witness to their faith in civil societies where the religious freedom of the individual is either denied or restricted, or those who suffer hostility from religious fundamentalist, or those who because of their faith, are threaten and persecuted by government authorities. How true, also for our times and continent is the maxim of Tertullian: “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church”!

We have reflected on numerous ideas and exchanged many experiences during this Congress. Above all, we have focused on the Christian identity of the lay faithful, on the importance of Christian initiation and ongoing formation, on our belonging to Church as a mystery of communion, of our co-responsibility in building up the local Church and parish community, of the experience of small faith communities, ecclesial movements and new communities as a precious gift for the life of the Church. We want to be active, and not passive nor discouraged lay Catholics; we want to be protagonists in the life of our local Churches in affective and effective communion with our bishops and clergy.

John Paul II had once referred to those who believe in Christ in this continent as a “small flock” entrusted with a great mission: that of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, that is the supreme service and the greatest gift that the Church can offer the people of Asia (cf. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 10, 20). We are a small flock then, that does not suffer a complex or fear from being a minority, nor wants to be contained within the walls of the Church; rather, we feel the call to be ‘leaven that causes the dough to rise’, salt that seasons’ and light that shines for this entire continent. In these days, many have shared with us their encouraging experiences of fraternal ecumenism with Christians of other confessions as well as others who live harmonious and in dialogue with those who are adherents to other religions. Also moving have been those who live Christian charity to a heroic degree in their service to the poorest of the poor, not to mention the eloquent examples of the “domestic Church” given by so many families. We have also considered the dedicated work of many who are engaged in the work of Christian formation and a the general service to the common good through the apostolate of Catholic institutions of education, or by means of the many and various forms of Christian presence through the means of social communication, or through business or in politics or in other cultural spheres. We are few, but we are at once present everywhere, moved by love for all of our brothers and sisters in Asia,

without any exceptions or discrimination. We are proud of the richness of our ancient cultural traditions, and, at the same time, motivated to share our faith in Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of every human aspiration.

Dear brothers and sisters. Asia is currently undergoing unprecedented processes of growth and social transformation. Its immense population and rapid economic growth make it a significant epicenter at the international level. Nevertheless, it faces serious problems regarding the promotion of freedom, justice, solidarity and the development of more humane living conditions. In light of this, we are convinced that the unique Christian contribution could be essential towards the resolution of these problems for the good of our people. So, before this enormous task, we are sustained by the certainty that, just as the Synod for Asia pointed out and as the Holy Father repeated in his message, “the peoples of Asia need Jesus Christ and his Gospel because this continent is thirsting for the water that Jesus alone can give”. (cf. *Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to Card. Rylko*).

Thus, by the grace of God, and while thankful and joyful for having encountered him, the true face of God, the fullness of revelation, the one Savior, the fulfillment of every human aspiration, we renew our efforts to share our Christian experience with all of our “neighbors”, in our neighborhoods, in our schools and universities, at the workplace, in our dealings with others. This is not a marketing strategic or fanatic proselytizing, but rather, simply the fruit of an Encounter, for as Pope Benedict XVI explained in his message: “Those who have found in Jesus the truth, joy and beauty which give meaning and direction to their lives will naturally desire to bring this grace to others” (*ibid*).

Take courage friends! The Risen Christ has won for us the final victory! Evil no longer has the final word. Love has proved itself stronger than death, hatred, indifference! The power of the God’s grace strengthens our weakness. We are invited to generously share with others this fullness that we have received, this great treasure, this pearl of great price, which is Jesus Christ, even if we carry this treasure in earthen vessels. We bear witness to a miraculous source of unity, to a mystery of communion, to which every human person is called, and for which every human heart desires in its depths. We are the bearers of the most supreme good for the Asia people of today and tomorrow. May God assist us all in this tasks and may the Blessed Mother, accompany us, console us, and intercede for us before her Son, enlightening our way and preceding us as the “Bright star of the New Evangelization”.