

The Eucharist as Mission

Mission as Dialogue

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1. The Eucharist is an Invitation to Communion, It Makes the Church

“I have wanted so much to eat the Passover meal with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15). There is passion in his words when Jesus expresses his intense desire to spend some time with his beloved disciples before he is torn away from them by cruel hands. Having loved them, “he **loved them** to the very end” (Jn 13:1). Everything at the Last Supper speaks of closeness, intense sharing, warmth, depth. The bondedness that Jesus wishes to create among his disciples could not have been expressed in stronger words than these, ‘Remain in me,’ he says, and I will remain in you’ (Jn 15:4).

During this Eucharistic Congress we would like to respond, “**Stay with us** Lord,” as the disciples of Emmaus did, (Lk 24:29), especially as we feel the challenges of a changing world press hard upon us and the vision of Faith grows dim all around us. His presence makes a difference; it provides the light we need and supplies the strength we lack. We pray that this is what the Cebu Congress will accomplish for us.

A **meal** is always a happy occasion for close sharing, and Jesus rarely refuses an invitation, especially when it offers him an opportunity to reach out to someone who needs help: he has meals with Levi (Lk 5:27-32), with Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50), with another leading Pharisee (Lk 14: 1-24), with Mary, Martha & Lazarus (Lk 10:38-42), Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10), with the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35).

But this occasion is unique. It is more than an ordinary meal with his friends. Here he means to draw his close disciples into an extraordinary experience of ‘**communion**’, the memory of which will remain on till the end of time. He breaks bread and gives it out to his disciples; and so he does with the cup (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25). He asks his disciples to continue to do the same whenever they gather.

The Eucharist is Christ’s greatest gift to the Church. It is his **self-gift** to his disciples. It is a call to oneness in the fellowship of the Triune God. It brings into existence a ‘Communion of Believers’. Truly, the Eucharist makes the Church.

2. The ‘Communion of Believers’ that the Eucharist Creates is for a Mission

The most significant dimension of the Eucharist is that the ‘Communion’ it creates is for a Mission. In fact the **Eucharist is Mission**. The exchange of greetings, the reading from the Scriptures, the announcement of the Word, intercessions in behalf of the whole human family,

invocation of the Holy Spirit, transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, adoration and worship, the exchange of peace and communion, the sharing of the bread, and the final greetings with the exhortation to go forth and offer to others what they have received...all these together amount to a powerful proclamation of the Lord's plan for humanity. "...every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In and through the Eucharist Jesus draws the whole of human society to himself (Jn 12:32). United with him as branches with the vine, believers become capable of going forth and producing fruit in abundance, transforming society.

Drawing society together itself is a great Mission today in a fragmented world, when people feel pulled apart in all directions by forces beyond their control: ethnic hatred, political anger, collective greed. In the Eucharist, with the announcement of the Word and the gift of himself, Jesus summons every tribe and tongue and people and nation unto himself (Rev 14:6). For God's plan for the human family is that they be One. "There is **one body and one Spirit**, just as there is one hope to which God has called you" (Eph 4:4). The cementing force holding this sacred edifice together is the Spirit (Eph 2:22), the faithful forming living stones (1 Pet 2:5).

The Eucharist acts as the **bond of togetherness** and communion among Christian believers. But the love generated within Christian family does not remain idle there; it reaches out to the entire society, going beyond differences of caste, class, ethnicity, nationality, and economic background. It leaves no room for personal egoism, selfish ambition, or collective hatred; nor admits of any reasons for inter-community conflict.

3. The Eucharist Equips One for the Mission

The "GO" at the end of the Eucharist is not mere ceremonial dismissal, it is a **mission-laden mandate**. It echoes the parting Message of Jesus "Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples... and teach them" (Mt 28:19-20), after which he adds an assurance, "I will be with you". Though the mandate is clear enough, this reassurance of our Divine Saviour alone can give us the courage to go beyond ourselves, and reach out to the ends of the earth. For, the way is long and the compulsions of the journey demanding.

In an age when believers think that fidelity to the Gospel itself is strenuous enough, it calls for extraordinary courage and profound faith to take upon oneself the task of bearing Christ's Message of Hope to others. It indeed calls for profound **spiritual convictions** to take it to the other side of the street, to the furthest slum, to the village beyond that mountain or the river, to people of other convictions, really to the 'periphery'.

It demands even greater determination to go and speak of Jesus to other ethnic groups as Paul did, or to move to distant shores as Francis Xavier did and as many Filipino Missionaries as doing today, or to 'furthest limits of human existence and human agony', as Pope Francis invites us to do. The Eucharist is rightly called '*panis viatorum*', nourishment for travellers. It supplies **energies**. It builds up inner sturdiness for the Mission.

We would like to greet each person present here who longs to be a true Evangelizer with this powerful prayer: "May you be made strong with all the strength which comes from his **glorious power**, so that you may be able to endure everything with patience" (Col 1:11).

4. The Eucharist Give Life, Supplies Energies

One remembers how Christian communities under totalitarian regimes in recent times, not only survived, but grew and flourished, strengthened by the Eucharist. For, the Eucharist gives **life** (Jn 6:35). Jesus says, “If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever” (Jn 6:51). It gives life to the world (Jn 6:32-33)--- and **life** in all its fullness (Jn 10:10). It offers the word of **life** (1 Jn 1:1; Jn 6:68). There are more Christians under stress today than any other period of history. We need **resolute convictions** to remain faithful in this era of persecution on the one hand and secularization on the other.

St. Ephraem has a powerful image in this connection. He says that the one who eats this bread, eats **fire** and clothes himself with **fire**. The disciples of Emmaus felt as though **fire** was burning in their hearts when they heard Jesus explain the Scriptures to them. No wonder they set out on their return journey the very same night, with a sturdy sense of Mission, after they had broken bread with him (Lk 24:32-33).

There are times when a person in the service of the Gospel feels broken and exhausted in the face of growing indifference, opposition, or outright rejection. He/she would like to give up. “Take away my life”, he would like to say with Elijah. Then suddenly, he hears an angel’s reassuring voice, “Arise and eat” (1 Kings 19:4-7). Eucharist is nourishment. Indeed, “God strengthens those who are weak and tired” (Is 40:29).

5. The ‘Self-giving Mission’ of Jesus in the Eucharist Continues through the Self-giving Activity of Christian Workers

Benedict XVI says “We cannot approach the Eucharist without being drawn into the Mission” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 84). Jesus’ example of **self-giving** conceals irresistible motivating power within, so that everyone who derives strength from him feels drawn to do the same (1 Jn 3:16). Faith is not an idle intellectual conviction; it is a driving-force towards self-giving, even to the point of self-forgetfulness.

“If anyone wants to come with me,” says Jesus, “he must forget self, **carry his cross**, and follow me” (Mt 16:24). He must be ready to humble himself and give his life for others (Mt 20:28). Washing the feet of his disciples was just the beginning for Jesus (Jn 13:1-15); he emptied himself, and went to the cross (Philip 2:7-8).

“My life is the **continuation of my mass**”, Blessed Alberto Hurtado used to say. Yes, the Eucharist overflows into life in the form of generosity, kindness, forgiveness, sincerity, and persevering work. It adds a quality to our decisions at home, in the kitchen, in the bedroom, in places of business and entertainment; in hospitals when the elimination of an unborn child is being contemplated, in the street where human dignity is dragged to dust, in executive office where the fates of millions are being decided.

The Eucharist takes Christian **hearts by surprise**, urging them to hasten to the aid of marginalized groups like migrants, minority communities, and underprivileged. The rich go out to help the poor or get them an employment, scholars reach out to the slums and remote villages to take classes for the illiterate, highly qualified persons spend a weekend giving training to unemployed youth, teaching Catechism, or preaching a retreat.

The **spiritual dynamism** generated in the Eucharist produced a Mother Teresa in Kolkata (Calcutta), as it produced a Francis Xavier centuries earlier on the missionary front, and

martyrs in Korea, Japan, Vietnam and other Asian countries, and founders and foundresses of congregations at the service of Education and Health, each in his/her own time.

6. Mission is Dialogue with Contemporary Problems---and Daring to Confront them

The Bishops of Asia have always emphasized the importance of Dialogue with the poor. Here is a central Christian message: “When you run short of generosity, come **close to the poor**”. That is what Mother Teresa did. That is what Vincent de Paul did. Pope Francis invites us to draw near to “new forms of poverty and vulnerability” (EG 210). He assures us, “We also evangelize when we attempt to confront the various challenges which can arise” (EG 61). Human sensitivity awakens before genuine human needs.

However, there are times when we are tempted to act like the disciples before a hungry crowd. “Send them away,” they said; let them fend for themselves. Jesus’ response was different. “You yourselves give them something to eat”, was his prompt reply (Mk 6:37-44). Clearly he was eliciting an initiative from them even in a moment of helplessness. That is when miracles happen.

The early Christians shared their resources (Acts 2:42-44). The Eucharist then is sharing, **solidarity, and responsibility** for the larger society, poorer people. This Divine Sacrament becomes Mission and Dialogue when it brings healing to emotionally hurt individuals, broken families, and fragmented societies. It revives faith in unmotivated youth and reveals the face of Christ to persons who never had an encounter with him. It brings industriousness and productivity to factories, creativity and enterprise to management, sincerity and consciousness to administration. It inspires Christian legislators, civil servants and public leaders to make political decisions in behalf of weaker communities and seek the common good at national and international levels.

7. Jesus Seems to be Entrusting Humanity to the Church Today as Mother Mary to John (Jn 19:26)

Today, human sensitivity seems to be weakening under pressure from the impersonal dimensions of the New Economy. **Poverty deepens** and takes on new and alarming forms, including human trafficking and enslavement in new shapes. The gap between the rich and the poor widens. Paul lamented about Corinth, “Some are hungry while others get drunk” (1 Cor 11:17-22). Today the gap is wider; and it keeps widening. Truly, humanity in our times feels broken and bruised, uncertain of its future, with horizons dark, hope sinking. Jesus seems to be commending this bewildered human family to the care of Mother Church, as he entrusted his beloved disciple John to Mary, “Woman, behold, your son”(Jn 19:26).

However, there are **lights on the horizon**. For example, there is general recognition of human interdependence, a conviction that we belong together, that our needs are identical, and that we need each other. Paul assures us that in Christ everything will find its proper place (Col 1:17), when people will learn to combine concern for themselves with those of others; for we form one body (1 Cor 12:12-30). Despite growing distances between self-centred communities, there is visible convergence of thought, fusion of longings, a desire for togetherness, and a thirst for the Transcendent.

8. Missionary Dialogue is Responding to the Cry of the Poor, the Cry of Christ on the Cross

Those who live in sheltered conditions little realize the **cruel realities** in which their less fortunate brothers and sisters live today. One may be a refugee, an immigrant, or a person thrown out of job; another may be a landless labourer, a street-urchin, or a person of humble caste origin. One may be struggling every day with alcoholics and drug-addicts, thugs, procurers or prostitutes in the neighbourhood; another may have become inured to hearing of divorces, abortions, and children thrown on the streets; and another still may be feeling taken advantage of while in employment and outright exploited while out of job. Such people see all doors close around them as they look to the future.

However, they all cherish an eager desire to defend their personal identity, reconstruct their dignity, and move away from utter dehumanization. They would readily open themselves to anyone who came forward with sympathy, understanding, and hospitality. They would leap for joy if they could enter into **dialogue** with persons who would give them concrete assistance, protection from exploitation and bring meaning into their lives. These are situations when we think of Pope Francis' call for a 'Revolution of Tenderness' (EG 288).

It is often during silent moments before the Eucharist that a believer hears the cry of the poor, a cry that rises to the heavens (James 5:4). It is here that he/she finds energies to sustain a worthwhile struggle. Some have gone to heroic extent in giving their lives in behalf of the weakest as Archbishop Oscar Romero did, who brought his Eucharistic energies to radical social commitment. He combined deep faith, with perceptive understanding of the situation and boundless courage.

Today the cry of **Suffering Humanity** cannot but stir even the most passive believer to some form of committed action. It is the cry of Christ from the cross. Until we recognize this truth, our Eucharistic devotion lacks depth. It was he who said that what was done to the poor was done to him. (Mt 25:31-44). Let us learn to see Christ in the "distressing disguise of the poor" (Mother Teresa). "We need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives" (EG 268)

9. Dialogue is Helped Best when One Adopts a Holistic Vision of Reality

However, acute problems are not solved by **emotion-driven responses** alone. Whilst emotion can provide energies, intelligence must give the direction. Discretion must guide the paths. The response must be well-informed. Trends in society are in rapid transition and the forces at work are becoming increasingly more complex. Complex problems cannot be confronted by a simplistic analysis of the situation; Pope Francis warns against ideology-led solutions. They need to be studied at depth. A one-sided approach or a reductionistic view of things can be self-defeating.

Only a multi-disciplinary approach will help to develop a holistic vision of the social processes at work in a given context. For example, committed social activists cannot ignore the compulsions of the Economy. Nor can persons at the service of the Economy neglect **social values** which alone hold a society together. Nor, again, can teachers of social values act as though they are the inventors of these values, forgetting the cultural and religious roots where they are derived from.

So it becomes clear that diverse **disciplines must dialogue with each other**, as faith and reason must keep up a conversation. Researchers in the areas of physical, biological, and social sciences will need continuously to keep exchanging notes with each other. Philosophical and theological thinkers too must do the same. It never helps to absolutize conclusions one reaches within one's own field of competence, or impose them on those in other disciplines, instead of sharing their findings together. Experts can over-step their boundaries.

Pope John Paul II gave the following Mission to Catholic Universities: **continuous scrutinizing of reality**, seeking for truth, dialoguing between faith and reason, integrating information from diverse fields of knowledge, promoting interdisciplinary research and reflection, analysis of moral implications, ethical and religious principles (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*).

These are all truly areas for dialogue. Secular and spiritual wisdom must draw closer. Intelligence and faith must find ways of relating. Justice and mercy must embrace.

Pope Francis takes enormous pains to argue that **God's justice is his mercy** (*Misericordiae Vultus* 20).

10. Dialoguing with the Cosmos means Respecting God's Creation

Christian concern is all-embracing. As the bearer of the Good News seeks to be a "universal brother" (RM 89) to the whole of humanity, he feels a deep sense of **responsibility for the cosmic reality** as well. The Eucharist itself reminds him of the relationship of the cosmos with God: bread and wine are gifts of the earth while being products of human hands, soon to be changed into the body and blood of Christ.

Francis of Assisi related with various elements in nature and sang a canticle to God for his creation. Human beings have been given the responsibility of acting as stewards of God's creation. They ought to care for their environment and protect it from **pollution and over-exploitation**. They have an obligation to respect the natural order things and make judicious use of non-renewable resources, keeping in mind also the needs of future generations. They need to be aware of the dangers of unplanned deforestation, irresponsible waste-disposal, and careless use of chemicals. It is only with human cooperation that the new heavens and a new earth is brought into existence (2 Pet 3:13, Eph 1:10).

11. Dialoguing with Cultural and Religious Traditions

Possibly, 'Dialogue with Cultures', encouraged by the Bishops Asia, has not received the attention it deserves. The sharing of the Message of Christ with people involves dialoguing with the inner convictions of communities and with the cultural heritages that sustain them. It is for the Evangelizer to identify the **meeting points** between the cherished dreams of individual communities and the values of the Gospel. If he can lead ideals and values of communities to a happy encounter with evangelical proposals, it will bring meaning to human contexts and direction to societies.

This endeavour may be described as the **evangelization of cultures** or animation of families and communities with the vibrancy of the Gospel. It integrates the Christian message with people's lifestyles and value-systems. In this process, the Evangelizer is not merely a giver,

he/she remains an assiduous searcher all the time. He is a constant learner and respects the values in the culture even of the smallest ethnic group.

12. Dialoguing with the Millennial Civilizations of Asia

The Dialogue related to the Mission is not a way of promoting self-interest. Pope John Paul II says, Dialogue is to discover the **presence of Christ** and the working of the Spirit among diverse people (RM 56). We see Paul entering into dialogue with cultures, beliefs and religious values of various peoples: Lycaonians, Athenians, philosophers, poets (Acts 17:18, 26-28). He was as conversant with Jewish and Hellenic thought, as with Stoic philosophy and mystery cults. While he never faltered in his orthodoxy, he took advantage of the seeds of the Gospel to be found in every school of thought. *Gaudium et Spes* exhorts us in our days too to listen to all shades of opinion (GS 43) and dialogue with them.

This respect for culture finds its best expression in the inculturation efforts of the Church in theology, liturgy, organization and spiritual traditions. Inculturation has nothing to do with cheap, trivializing improvisations, or an eagerness to make sensational xenophobic statements. On the contrary, it is related to **meaningfulness** and **relevance**. It has reference to cultural rootedness and the legitimate ethnic pride of people, expressed in forms of beauty, harmony, dignity, values, concepts and depth. In fact, the Asian 'sense of the sacred' confers **profundity** even on simple '**popular devotions**' that are extremely dear to our communities.

13. Dialoguing with Religious Traditions

Here in Asia again, the quality of Dialogue rises to new heights when people begin to share their **religious experiences**. Formal dialogue has often been trapped in tiresome routine or tended to exhaust itself in the monotonous comparison of concepts and doctrines. On the other hand, dealing with live issues and experiences brings relevance and purposefulness to the dialogue and induces commitment to a cause.

Christians approach other religious traditions with utmost respect. Even if their symbolisms and faith formulations are unfamiliar to us, they have served as guiding lights to millions of people for centuries. They have an inherent power of their own and deserve our esteem. The Holy Spirit has never been absent from human search for meaning.

Our own internal traditions may appear strange to persons of other religious beliefs, and our forms of worship and styles of formulating beliefs unfamiliar. Warm-hearted dialogue leads to sharing of deeper meanings and paves the way for the tapping of each others' spiritual resources for the good of humanity. That is the only way forward for the human family to construct a future together.

The Scriptures serve as a mighty resource for taking such conversations to depths. Even while the world is becoming more secularized, amazingly, there is attention when human anxieties are searched to their depths. It is at this level that religions can find their meeting points. It is a missionary's duty, then, to have "profound willingness to listen" (*Novo Millennio Inneunte*, 56). It is the Spirit who guides human search at these levels.

14. Dialogue for Social Transformation

The field of Christian action is the entire world (Mt 13:38). It is here that the believing community is called to prove themselves salt and light (Mt 5:13-16). They have to act as a leaven in social life (Mt 13:33), bringing the spirit of the Gospel into various professional fields. Every form of injustice invites a negative response that will ultimately threaten the fabric of social order. Every form of **corruption** contributes to lack of trust, inefficiency, stagnation, and ultimately economic failure. Indifference to family values and cultural traditions leads a society to a **moral collapse**.

In this respect the Christian community cannot act as though it has been always above blame (1 Cor 11:17-22; James 2:1-6). But the general situation has worsened today. No believer can remain unconcerned. *Christi Fideles Laici* asks “Why do you stand here idle all day?” (Mt 20:6), get involved. Dialogue must pave the way, **correcting imbalances in thought** in order to build a responsible ‘civil society’ that will stand for the dignity of the individual, rights of the human person, of women and children, of minorities; ensure the care of the aged and ailing, respect for life, freedom of religion, just legislation and international harmony. God’s glory is the human being fully alive (Iraeneus).

When Dialogue leads to the **penetration of evangelical values** into various dimensions of culture and levels of thought, it influences the criteria of judgement. It paves the way for the development of social structures that favour healthy and humane relationships and good governance. It discourages a culture of consumerism, senseless waste, and a life of superficiality. It combines effective economic production with fair distribution of wealth. It promotes healthy relationship between the economy and the environment, legitimate profit and just wages, scientific advance and human ecology, urban growth and social ecology, expansion of the digital continent and **search for the Transcendent**.

15. Dialogue towards Peace: Healing Historic Memories, Reducing Anger, Generating Good Will

The Eucharist is eminently the Sacrament of peace, the peace announced by the angels at his birth (Lk 2:14). The greeting that Jesus gives his disciples is always ‘**Peace**’ (Jn 20:19). “Peace I leave with you”, he says (Jn 14:27). In fact he is our peace (Eph 2:14). He urges people to reconcile before offering sacrifice (Mt 5:23-25). “Blessed as the peacemakers”, he says (Mt 5:9).

But unfortunately there are jealousies and petty quarrels even among Christian workers and fellow-worshippers (1 Cor 11: 18), as Pope Francis admits. Peace must begin at home: within Christian families and believing communities. However, Eucharistic peace should have a wider significance. Peace is a Mission. We are **ambassadors of Christ** befriending the whole of humanity (2 Cor 5:18-20). It is our vocation to build bridges, heal wounds, remove ethnic and racial prejudices, and work for the prevention of war.

God’s plan is to bring everything to himself (Col 1:20), both near and far (Eph 2:17). But the reality of hatred in the world remains. Adoration Services should be moments for sharing the Agony of Jesus in Gethsemane, and Eucharistic Procession for reflecting on his sufferings during the Way of the Cross... **an agony that humanity** itself undergoes today in facing terrorism and ongoing violence.

There is so much of **collective anger** in the world today, of class against class, caste against caste, ethnic group against ethnic group, tribe against tribe, religious group against religious

group, ideologies against ideologies, theological vision against theological vision, economic interest against economic interest, national ambition against national ambition, political alliance against political alliance. Usually we give attention to the immediate causes of conflicts and harassments, forgetting that many of them arise due to negative memories of **historic injuries** that still persist in the minds of individuals and societies. Unless they are healed and prejudices moved, violence is bound to breakout again.

Historically speaking, we have all hurt each other as ethnic groups, nations, or civilizations. It is part of evangelical work to heal the memories of these **historic wounds**, at the ethnic, cultural, national and even civilizational levels. It is God's work. Can we become the '**Lambs of God**' who take away the 'Anger of the World'? At least reduce that anger...lest more of our Christians suffer? Can we urge than human concerns be placed before commercial interests?

While we sing with the angels 'Peace to men of good will' (Lk 2:14), can we help generate this 'Good Will', the *bona voluntas* that seems to be absent?

16. Dialogue Means Making Humble Proposals to a Secularized Society in Our Times

Dialoguing with the postmodern secularized society is not easy. But there are reasons to remain hopeful. It is true that the secularised individual today finds it hard to believe in anything beyond the visible; and yet he strains himself to gaze beyond the horizon, what lies beneath the senses; he keeps questioning himself within his disturbed conscience. It may be that he makes profit-making his absolute concern; and yet often he shows himself generous. Tired of the monotony of liturgical rites and symbols, he is constantly evolving new ones. Though bored of traditional religious teaching, he longs to contribute towards the creation of a better world. As his spirit of possessiveness grows, his concern for others seems to be keeping pace. While over-enthusiastic pastors try to make liturgy attractive by making it lively, he seems to **hunger for silence** and quiet worship (*Sinodo dei Vescovi, l'Eucharistia, Pg. 219*).

Indeed, the secularized world is in search of the *latens deitas*, the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God. A Mystic is emerging in the renewed human person.

Teilhard de Chardin thought that the Eucharist **Christifies human activity**. It stirs in people an intense desire to pass on the values that they have received in their encounter with Christ (1 Jn 3:1:1) by guiding their ethical, doctrinal, ideological choices. It begins to influence the philosophy, art, literature, civil institutions, family traditions in society, and fosters positive cultural, political, economic, social values in it. It leads people to the '*deep waters*' of spiritual wisdom (Prov 20:5). Truly, moral and upright life is spiritual worship (Jn 4:23-24).

As the sense of sin diminishes in human hearts and confessions fall, society needs persons gifted in dialogue who can **revive the sense of values**, rebuild the sense of self-worth in shattered individuals, hold out hope to people on the path to despair.

It is a great pity that the **Pedagogy of Persuasion** seems to be going out fashion. What one hears is more of self-righteous denunciations and over-confident claims of the superiority of one's proposals, provoking a similar response. There is room for collective humility and a low-profile search for what is best in a warm-hearted dialogue. I have often described this as

“Whispering the Gospel to the Soul of Asia” in a context of personal depth and experiential intensity.

With too many people who have drifted away from the Church, there is need of spiritual guides who have developed the skills of Persuasion and who can pass on “the thought of Christ” with creativity (1 Cor 2:16).

17. Dialogue in Search of Truth and Beauty, True Enlightenment, and Decisive Encounter with God

Some interpret the verse 1 Pet 3:15 in this manner: “Adore Christ in your hearts... and be ready to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect”. There is then a relationship between worshipping the Lord who is meek and gentle and **explaining our hope** with the same gentleness. Evangelizers are ready to make themselves ‘weak with the weak’ (1 Cor 9:22). Their confidence comes from the conviction that they are answering to an expectation (RM 45), that through their work is realized the fulfilment of people’s longings (EA 19).

The awesome Beauty of the Eucharist does not make people over-confident and assertive. **It disarms**. It is not to be described so much in aesthetic terms, but experienced in its transforming power. It gives rise to a bewitching inner Harmony, in the context of which even **Silence becomes eloquent**. Eastern liturgies have retained something of this mystic air, capturing the eschatological dimension (Mt 26:29; Mc 14:25; Lk 22:28-30) that is inherent to these unspeakable mysteries.

Even the ‘popular forms of piety’ prevalent in many Asian countries radiate the joy of the Lord in their **cultural authenticity** and through their inner harmony.

18. “Do not be Afraid, Little Flock. Your Father is Pleased to Give You the Kingdom” (Lk 12:32)

And as believers emerge from worship after breaking the bread they ask themselves, ‘Were not our **hearts burning** as Jesus talked to us...and broke the Scriptures to us (Lk 24:32)? Do we not feel we have received grace upon grace (Jn 1:16), more than ever we could ask for or think of (Eph 3:20)? Are we not ready to go to the ends of the earth bearing his Message (Mt 28:19) to draw all humanity to him’ (Jn 12:32)?

When that happens, we know that Christ’s ‘little flock’ (Lk 12:32) in Asia has taken on its Mission, and that the Eucharist is Mission and Mission is Dialogue. It is this Dialogue that opens out the doors of the Kingdom to reveal the face of Christ to the whole of humanity.

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