

A MESSAGE FROM HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

"You are the heirs to a Church that has been a mighty force for good in the world"

DUBLIN - 17 JUNE 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With great affection in the Lord, I greet all of you who have gathered in Dublin for the Fiftieth International Eucharistic Congress, especially Cardinal Brady, Archbishop Martin, the clergy, religious and faithful of Ireland, and all of you who have come from afar to support the Irish Church with your presence and prayers.

The theme of the Congress – Communion with Christ and with One Another – leads us to reflect upon the Church as a mystery of fellowship with the Lord and with all the members of his body. From the earliest times the notion of *koinonia* or *communio* has been at the core of the Church's understanding of herself, her relationship to Christ her founder, and the sacraments she celebrates, above all the Eucharist. Through our Baptism, we are incorporated into Christ's death, reborn into the great family of the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ; through Confirmation we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit; and by our sharing in the Eucharist, we come into communion with Christ and each other visibly here on earth. We also receive the pledge of eternal life to come.

The Congress also occurs at a time when the Church throughout the world is preparing to celebrate the Year of Faith to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Second Vatican Council, an event which launched the most extensive renewal of the Roman Rite ever known.

Based upon a deepening appreciation of the sources of the liturgy, the Council promoted the full and active participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic sacrifice. At our distance today from the Council Fathers' expressed desires regarding liturgical renewal, and in the light of the universal Church's experience in the intervening period, it is clear that a great deal has been achieved; but it is equally clear that there have been many misunderstandings and irregularities.

The renewal of external forms, desired by the Council Fathers, was intended to make it easier to enter into the inner depth of the mystery. Its true purpose was to lead people to a personal encounter with the Lord, present in the Eucharist, and thus with the living God, so that through this contact with Christ's love, the love of his brothers and sisters for one another might also grow. Yet not infrequently, the revision of liturgical forms has remained at an external level, and "active participation" has been confused with external activity. Hence much still remains to be done on the path of real liturgical renewal. In a changed world, increasingly fixated on material things, we must learn to recognize anew the mysterious presence of the Risen Lord, which alone can give breadth and depth to our life.

The Eucharist is the worship of the whole Church, but it also requires the full engagement of each individual Christian in the Church's mission; it contains a call to be the holy people of God, but also one to individual holiness; it is to be celebrated with great joy and simplicity, but also as worthily and reverently as possible; it invites us to repent of our sins, but also to forgive our brothers and sisters; it binds us together in the Spirit, but it also commands us in the same Spirit to bring the good news of salvation to others.

Moreover, the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, his body and blood given in the new and eternal covenant for the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of the world. Ireland has been shaped by the Mass at the deepest level for centuries, and by its power and grace generations of monks, martyrs and missionaries have heroically lived the faith at home and spread the Good News of God's love and forgiveness well beyond your shores. You are the heirs to a Church that has been a mighty force for good in the world, and which has given a profound and enduring love of Christ and his blessed Mother to many, many others. Your forebears in the Church in Ireland knew how to strive for holiness and constancy in their personal lives, how to preach the joy that comes from the Gospel, how to promote the importance of belonging to the universal Church in communion with the See of Peter, and how to pass on a love of the faith and Christian virtue to other generations. Our Catholic faith, imbued with a radical sense of God's presence, caught up in the beauty of his creation all around us, and purified through personal penance and awareness of God's forgiveness, is a legacy that is surely perfected and nourished when regularly placed on the Lord's altar at the sacrifice of the Mass.

Thankfulness and joy at such a great history of faith and love have recently been shaken in an appalling way by the revelation of sins committed by priests and consecrated persons against people entrusted to their care. Instead of showing them the path towards Christ, towards God, instead of bearing witness to his goodness, they abused people and undermined the credibility of the Church's message. How are we to explain the fact that people who regularly received the Lord's body and confessed their sins in the sacrament of Penance have offended in this way?

It remains a mystery. Yet evidently, their Christianity was no longer nourished by joyful encounter with Jesus Christ: it had become merely a matter of habit. The work of the Council was really meant to overcome this form of Christianity and to rediscover the faith as a deep personal friendship with the goodness of Jesus Christ. The Eucharistic Congress has a similar aim. Here we wish to encounter the Risen Lord. We ask him to touch us deeply. May he who breathed on the Apostles at Easter, communicating his Spirit to them, likewise bestow upon us his breath, the power of the Holy Spirit, and so help us to become true witnesses to his love, witnesses to the truth. His truth is love. Christ's love is truth.

My dear brothers and sisters, I pray that the Congress will be for each of you a spiritually fruitful experience of communion with Christ and his Church. At the same time, I would like to invite you to join me in praying for God's blessing upon the next International Eucharistic Congress, which will take place in 2016 in the city of Cebu!

To the people of the Philippines I send warm greetings and an assurance of my closeness in prayer during the period of preparation for this great ecclesial gathering. I am confident that it will bring lasting spiritual renewal not only to them but to all the participants from across the globe. In the meantime, I commend everyone taking part in the present Congress to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of God, and to Saint Patrick, the great patron of Ireland; and, as a token of joy and peace in the Lord, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing.