



PONTIFICIO COMITATO
PER I CONGRESSI EUCHARISTICI INTERNAZIONALI

REPORT

of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses

Rome

Villa Aurelia, 8-10 November 2018

The Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congress was held in Rome from the eight to tenth November 2018 to prepare the 52nd Congress that will take place at Budapest in Hungary from 13-20 September 2020.

The Plenary Assembly is the most significant occasion for the collaboration between the Pontifical Committee and the Delegates of the particular Churches (*Statutes*, nn. 6-7). The preparation of the meeting began in 2017 with two successive circular letters sent to the Episcopal Conferences in order to obtain the appointment or reconfirmation of the respective National Delegates. At the beginning of 2018 the appointed Delegates were sent a personal invitation with all the necessary information together with the general programme of the agenda to participate in this event. In the meantime, the means and human resources were sought for carrying out this meeting of an international nature.

The Plenary Assembly, which was held at the Villa Aurelia, comprised about ninety people: seventy National Delegates from the five continents, the personnel and members of the Pontifical Committee, the Hungarian Delegation led by the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Cardinal Peter Erdő and some guests.

At the initial session on Thursday, 8 November, the President of the Pontifical Committee, His Excellency Mgr. Piero Marini, after welcoming those present and the members of the Committee, among whom were Cardinals S. Rylko and R. Sarah, outlined for the National Delegates the nature of the Pontifical Committee, the task of the Plenary Assembly and the guidelines of the next Congress that will have at its centre the Eucharist “*source of the life and mission of the Church.*” In the aftermath of celebrating the 51st Congress in Cebu, an environment of relative human poverty, since it is on the edge of the world’s wellbeing, but rich in faith, the next *statio orbis* is going to be in a large city of Europe where the Christian faith seems to have lost its vital impact. Because of this the Church – amid the epochal change involving it – is called to exercise its prophetic vocation by re-proposing the implications that come to maturity in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

The President then went on to recall how the Eucharist, which describes the total gift of the Son of God, calls the baptised to a new praxis of acceptance and becomes transformed into the magisterium about “*You indeed are not doing so,*” which is capable of shaping eucharistic men and women who spend their life in serving others and who become inserted into the human city bringing in their hearts and lives the memory of Christ’s love. “*It is this way of being*” – he concluded – “*that starting from the eucharistic gift passes into Christians and aims to be radiated in society and culture.*”

There followed the intervention of the Archbishop of Cebu, Mgr. José S. Palma, who in 2016 hosted and directed the 51st International Eucharistic Congress celebrated in the Philippines. In an intervention that was full of memories and reflections he illustrated particularly the fruits that the great event produced in the Filipino Church, which in 2021 will celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Gospel in that land. Despite objective difficulties, the 51st International Eucharistic Congress – he said – has become a source of pride for Cebu and has set the standard for the international ecclesial meetings that will be celebrated in that country. On the other hand, Cebu, the cradle of Filipino Christianity, was blessed by a vibrant faith shaped by centuries of evangelisation by the Spanish missionaries. Proof of this is the devotion that the people of Cebu and the whole archipelago have for the Santo Niño, whose festivity is an occasion of extraordinary popular religiosity that is experienced in the whole country. As an appendix to his talk there was a short film showing the most important moments at that Congress and an intense dialogue that developed with Mgr. Dennis Villarojo, the General Secretary for the preparation of that event, who responded to numerous interventions of the Delegates.

In the afternoon Mrs Bruna Costacurta, lecturer in exegesis of the Old Testament at the Pontifical Gregorian University, presented a substantial talk on the biblical perspective, which is her own, on the basic theme of the Congress of Budapest taken from Psalm 87: “*All my springs are in you.*” Based on the metaphor of a fountain, she articulated her talk in three points in which she progressively illustrated the mysterious prodigy of the wellsprings in the two Testaments, the reality of the Eucharist as a source of life and, lastly, the thirst of humankind and the thirst of God. After her exposition many Delegates expressed their deep appreciation for her conference.

On the last evening session, following Father Vittore Boccardi’s introductory clarification about the perimeter of the topic, accounts of four National Eucharistic Congresses were presented in order to offer some examples as regards both the method of these celebrations and the fruits deriving from them. These presentations were made by the following: Mgr. Vicente Costa, Bishop of Jundiá, for Brazil; Mgr. José M. Garcia Cordeiro, Bishop of Bragança-Miranda, for Portugal; Mgr. Lizizila Kiala, Bishop of Sumbe, for Angola; Mgr. Robert Byrne, Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham, for England and Wales.

The day closed with the eucharistic celebration presided by His Excellency Mgr. Piero Marini, the President of the Pontifical Committee, in the chapel of the adjacent Generalate of the Dehoniani Fathers.

The work of Friday, 9 November, began with the talk given by Mgr. Pierangelo Sequeri, the dean of the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for studies on Marriage and the Family. His talk on “*Eucaristia forma ecclesiae*” was focused on the original ecclesial form to pass on then to immersion into the death of the Lord and the eucharistic sense of sacrifice. The brilliant treatment by the well-known theologian and musicologist stimulated a wide-ranging and positive discussion.

The meeting continued with the intervention by Cardinal Peter Erdő, who will host the next International Congress. The cardinal presented the basic text that was prepared for the 52nd Congress of Budapest. He drew attention to the present ecclesial climate, commenting on the chapters of the text to bring out its distinctive features and significance, while underlining the pastoral urgent needs of the Christian communities in our times.

At the afternoon session the presentation of the next Congress of Budapest was made in the talk by the Secretary of the local Committee, the Reverend Kornél Fabry, who with his team pointed out the state of preparation of the Congress and the steps taken so that the invitation of the Hungarian Church to the Churches of the Catholic world to celebrate the

Eucharistic Mystery with them could be realised and bear fruit. This presentation, enriched by short films, provided answers to so many questions of Delegates who for the first time were approaching an International Eucharistic Congress.

At the last meeting of the Assembly, Father Vittore Boccardi outlined the meaning of the service that each National Delegate can offer within the various particular Churches. His talk clarified the significance of the National Delegates' presence at a theological and pastoral level and the task to which they are called in order that the respective particular Churches may increasingly live the Eucharist as the source and culmination of mission. He particularly emphasised the task undertaken by National Delegates, ranging from translating and distributing the basic text in local languages to raising an awareness about the theme of the Congress, from commitment in organising national pilgrimages to the celebration of local Congresses.

In addition to the above-mentioned talks, the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Committee became an environment for sharing of experiences about the Eucharist in the various countries and an occasion of joyous fraternity shown especially in the liturgical celebrations.

The closing day of Saturday, 10 November, was marked first of all by the celebration of the Eucharist presided over by Cardinal Peter Erdő at the altar of the Chair in the Vatican Basilica, followed by the audience granted by the Holy Father to all the participants in the Hall of the Consistory in the Apostolic Palace.

In his greeting to His Holiness at the beginning of the audience, the President expressed the gratitude of all present for this most significant meeting and recalled how in a society dominated by relativism and agnosticism the International Eucharistic Congress offers Catholics the opportunity to strengthen their faith and bear witness that God, the source of all life, loves every creature unconditionally.

In his discourse the Holy Father asked *“What does it mean to celebrate a Eucharistic Congress in the modern and multicultural city, where the Gospel and the forms of religious affiliation have become marginal? It means cooperating with God’s grace in order to spread, through prayer and activity, a “Eucharistic culture” – in other words a way of thinking and working grounded in the Sacrament yet perceptible also beyond the limits of the Church community [...] The celebration of the Eucharist thus becomes a cradle of attitudes that generate a Eucharistic culture, for it impels us to express in our way of life and our thinking the grace of Christ who gave of himself to the full.”*

He went on to examine those attitudes that bespeak communion, service and mercy: *“Everyone laments the corrosive river of misery flowing through our society. It is made up of different kinds of fear, oppression, arrogance, cruelty, hatred, forms of rejection and lack of concern for the environment, not to mention others. And yet, Christians realize every Sunday that this swollen river is powerless against the ocean of mercy that inundates our world. The Eucharist is the wellspring of this ocean of mercy, for in it the Lamb of God, slain yet standing, makes flow from his pierced side streams of living water; he pours out his Spirit for a new creation and he offers himself as food at the table of the new Passover (cf. Apostolic Letter Misericordiae Vultus, 7). Mercy thus enters the veins of this world and helps to form the image and structure of the People of God suited to our modern age.”*

Pope Francis ended by stating that *“the Eucharist ... is a paschal mystery that can enhance the baptized as individuals, but also the earthly city in which they live and work. May the Budapest Eucharistic Congress foster processes of renewal in Christian communities, so that the salvation whose source is in the Eucharist will find expression in a Eucharistic culture capable of inspiring men and women of good will in the fields of charity, solidarity, peace, family life and care for creation.”*

At the end of the Audience, Pope Francis personally greeted everyone present.

The Plenary Assembly closed on the afternoon of Saturday, 10 November, with a visit guided by Professor Mgr. Crispino Valenziano to the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls and its cloister.

The appointment for the next Plenary Meeting of all the National Delegates will be held in the city of Budapest, Hungary, from the eighth to the eleventh May 2019. On that occasion they will visit the places of the Congress, be able to experience at close quarters the preparation for the event and become aware of the various ways of taking part.