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**National Eucharistic Congress of Taiwan**

**March 1st, 2019**

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,

Illustrious Civil and Military Officials,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

Today the Church in Taiwan, here in Chiayi, is gathered in the final act of its 4th Eucharistic Congress. I am particularly happy to be with you, thus making present, in some way, Pope Francis, who wished that I would represent him as his Special Envoy. I would like to assure you that, even though he could not personally participate in this encounter, he gladly unites himself to us, with the same affection, esteem, and consideration he would have expressed in person.

With this solemn Liturgy, the 4th Eucharistic Congress draws to a close. But what do we mean by a ‘congress’ and why, dear brothers and sisters, is it considered ‘eucharistic’?

The term ‘congress’ refers to an event of particular importance. Today’s event is certainly significant, because it is the coming together of all the baptized. The term ‘eucharistic’ calls to mind the ‘sign’, indicative of Jesus, which he left for his Disciples and the early Church. Through this ‘identifying sign’ Christians would be united to Him and become the family of God in a ‘new covenant’ open to all men and women of all times and places, and founded on the offering of Jesus’ own life to the Father.

The Eucharist is, therefore, the sacrament *par eccellence* that binds us to the life of Jesus. We, too, are drawn to Christ in the same way referred to in today’s Gospel. As Jesus passed through the towns of Galilee, the crowds were fascinated by him and amazed at his words and his very person. They were desirous to listen to him as he spoke to them of the Kingdom of God and healed “those who needed to be cured” (Lk 9:11b).

Jesus’ attraction was so strong that, at times, those who listened to him forgot about their own needs, because his preaching fascinated them to the point of making the time pass rather quickly. The Gospel also recalls the event of the multiplication of the loaves that satisfied the hunger of all who listened to Jesus. In the Church, this event is considered an early image of the Eucharist, the living Bread that satisfies the hunger for God of those who believe in Christ.

I like to think that we also desire, this very day, to be drawn by Jesus, whose living presence has been promised to us: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).

What was it that amazed Jesus’ contemporaries, if not the fact that he spoke to them of God, not in terms of an idea, a theory, or a dry doctrine, but as one who is like a father or a mother who loves his children, who speaks of life and of the meaning of life, with its joys and its difficulties, with its dramas and its hopes. He revealed to us the face of a God who does not abandon his creation to its own destiny, separating himself from it - a God who is not cold and indifferent to human suffering, but who shares in human realities. Jesus, in fact, before raising a child from the dead in Nain, first suffered with the child’s mother, who had just watched her baby die. He listened to the plea of Jairus and restored his daughter to life. He shared in the social exclusion and suffering of the lepers who asked him for mercy, sending them home healed. He also gave sight to the man born blind. He rejoiced with the mothers who brought their babies to him, and, caressing them, he blessed them. He understood the tragedy of the woman who had been ill for fifteen years and granted her healing, confirming her also in the faith. Jesus did not even judge the adulterous woman whom some wanted to stone, but, lifted her up from the ground from where she had been thrust with disdain, and sent her home reconciled. Finally, he asked to stay at the house of Zacchaeus, a rich and dishonest businessman, transforming his heart and very life, making him generous.

In this Congress, we want Christ to speak also to us. We desire, in particular, that he speak to our lives: to the spouses who do not understand and love each other as they once did; to the mothers and fathers who have serious problems with their children because of addiction to alcohol and drugs; to those who are afflicted with cancer or other serious illness, to those who, because of a lack of work or otherwise, live in a state of serious poverty. Finally, we want Jesus to speak to the elderly and to those who are at the end of their lives, perhaps even losing their purpose for living. Each person knows his own suffering, his own poverty, his own moral or spiritual disorder, and needs to hear a good and true word, to be understood and taken care of.

When the Bishops of Taiwan decided to celebrate this Eucharistic Congress, they did not intend to organize another event or religious celebration as in the past. They knew well that the society in which we are immersed needs, rather, to slow down a bit, and that in our lives, filled with many things, it is necessary to be deeply spiritually renewed, to rediscover the breath of God that gives life. We all know that, as Christians, we need to be strengthened in the faith in order to continue our journey with generosity, faith, and hope, like the two Disciples of Jesus who encountered the Risen One as they made their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were reinvigorated by his words and regained spiritual strength and great joy. Then, during supper, they recognized him in the ‘breaking’ of bread, a gesture that opened their eyes and permitted them to recognize, in that traveler, the living Lord. That gesture called to mind the Last Supper of Jesus and became, for the two Disciples and for the Church, the sign of the presence of Christ who would never abandon the community of faithful, and who, as the ‘Bread’ of eternal life, would nourish every believer on the journey of life. In the Eucharist, the prophetic words of Psalm 87:7 are fulfilled: “All my springs are in you,” words that are the theme of this Congress and that, according to the Psalmist, are the festive song of the People of God for the presence of the Lord among them.

A Eucharistic Congress, in fact, is precisely a great opportunity to rejoice in the presence of Jesus, to encounter Jesus alive in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the great gift that Jesus himself left for his Church as a memorial of himself, a memorial of that perfect offering eternally made by the Father. In the Eucharist, we enter into the Mystery that brought about our reconciliation with God. In the Eucharist, Jesus continues to intercede for us before the Father and renews his prayer of praise and expiation. The Eucharist is the re-actualization of the work of redemption and our bond of charity; it is the sacrament of faith and our *viaticum*, the sign and cause of unity in the Church, the center of life of the Christian community; it is that which gives vitality and always renews the Church; it is the source and summit of the entire work of evangelization.

Thus, each time we celebrate the Eucharist, the Holy Mass, we not only make present the Supper of the Lord with his Disciples, but we also relive the same Supper with Jesus and the Apostles, in the most sacred gesture that can be celebrated from one end of the Earth to the other. In the ‘breaking’ of the Eucharistic Bread, we ultimately are brought into communion with Christ.

In the Second Reading, taken from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, the Apostle recounts how Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, which was, at the same time, the constitutive rite of the early Church. The words of Paul are very instructive; let us listen to them again with due attention: “Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup […] saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this […] in remembrance of me’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Then the Apostle explained to the Corinthians that, in repeating that which Jesus desired, the mystery of salvation is forever renewed. In this, the entire spiritual good of the Church is encompassed, forever.

To the early Church among the gentiles, as in Corinth, Saint Paul entrusted the same sacrament that was celebrated in the first Judeo-Christian communities. In that way, Paul completed his ministry of evangelization. In fact, it would not have been sufficient to bring only the oral message of Jesus, but it was necessary, also, to give the Eucharist to the community in Corinth, without which the work of salvation would not have been complete. It is by means of the missionary work of proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating the Eucharist that the Church acquires strength to give witness to Jesus and to carry out her mission among the people. The Eucharist, the Church’s daily memory of Jesus, brings about grace and missionary commitment.

At this point, therefore, I would like to say a word about the importance of missionary work, so necessary on this Island of Taiwan, where the Church is still small, notwithstanding the many years of evangelization and her many valuable social and educational works. The work of evangelization cannot be delegated only to a group of missionaries; it must involve everyone: bishops, priests, religious men and women, the lay faithful, families, and even children, who are missionaries to their contemporaries. The work of evangelization, if nourished by the Eucharist, allows the Gospel to bear fruit. In fact, the Eucharist is the very source of the mission of evangelization. Proclaiming Jesus to all is not optional, nor is it a mere consequence in the life of the Church. Rather, it is an essential part of her, because a Church without missionary zeal is sterile. Pope Francis said it clearly: “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel!” (EG 97). In other words, “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor!” (EG 109). These are expressions that call to mind the first missionary plea, that of the pagan Macedonian, who in a vision implored the Apostle Paul: “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). That plea represents the perennial cry for evangelization. In this way, we understand, even more, the missionary heart of the Church, which never ceases to beat, always with the same anticipation, the same enthusiasm, and the same passion. It is a missionary heart that finds its source and strength in the Eucharist. And the Church desires still today, perhaps more than ever, to respond to the mandate of the Risen Jesus to bring the Gospel to all peoples. Thus, as long as humanity hungers and thirsts for Christ, the proclamation of the Gospel, flowing from that same missionary heart, will continue, configured to the reality of each culture, but within the context of the unique catholicity that unites all in the same faith. In fact, the Gospel and the Eucharist stir up the Church’s passion for human beings, for the whole of humanity, which is today in serious difficulty. In an egoistic and materialistic world, we feel the need “for a new vision aimed at promoting a humanism of fraternity and solidarity between individuals and peoples” (Letter *Humana communitas* of His Holiness Pope Francis, n. 6, 6 January 2019).

With the Gospel and the Eucharist, fraternity is born and develops as a new frontier of Christianity among the people. Fraternity, in fact, seems to be what is rather lacking in a modern world that is developed in many ways, yet so in need of true communion between people and nations. It is necessary that, in these times, a greater sense of respect and understanding of human life and the life of all people is formed and built up.

The Church, with her message and her values, wants to contribute profoundly to the growth of fraternity among peoples, as a new frontier, since she safeguards and brings to all the signs of the blessing of God and the spiritual richness of which she is the guardian. Beyond existential and geographic borders marked by languages and people, fraternity becomes the gift of God to humanity.

May this Eucharistic Congress help the Church in Taiwan to deeply reflect upon her mission and her role in the context of the reality in which she belongs, and to contribute, with her own witness and faithfulness to Christ, to the common good of the People of this Nation.

And may the Eucharist be for all of you the source of life and Christian mission. Amen.

Amen.