

Homily Opening Mass of the Asian Nurses' Congress.

Dear Asian Nurses.

I am very happy to be with you in this important Meeting, bringing to you the blessing of the Holy Father Benedict XVI.

I must begin by congratulating you upon the important work that you do as catholic nurses in Asia. You are working in a non-catholic environment, and as such your work takes on a special connotation.

It is indeed a fact that your working as nurses is a witness to the Love of God and His great mercy. We know that it is also a profession that you have chosen according your inclination, capacity and preparation, in order to have a honest way of living, to sustain yourselves and your families. But as Catholics, and more so, as members of CICIAMS, you are engaged in the preaching of the Gospel in the particular way that a Catholic Nurse should. Being in direct contact with the sick people, you are privileged announcers of the Gospel, exactly within the most critical moments of human life, especially illness and death.

You are the privileged bearers of the Light of Christ in the biggest Continent of the World, where unfortunately many are still not Christian. Christ said that He is the only way, truth and life, and there is only a small minority in your Continent that effectively knows it.

Sometimes it is said that it is enough for you to accomplish your work in a good way, and that nobody must be disturbed in their own belief, because all religions are good, and all lead to God.

But you know very well, there is no possibility of salvation outside Christ. He is the only One who was given to the mankind for its salvation, and there is no other name in which anybody maybe saved.

How does it happen? It is very opportune to remember the Vatican II Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which affirms that “those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life... But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1: 21,25) Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature", (Mk 16: 16) the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.

Therefore, your mission is to preach the Gospel to the Asian people, to announce the Good News of salvation to your Continent. It is true that people of good will as we already have said, are saved by Christ also without being incorporated to the Church; but it is very difficult for them to arrive, because they do not have the abundance of means available in the Catholic Church, in order to encounter Our Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

It is true that you must respect the people of other religions in their own belief. You must never impose the Catholic faith upon nobody, but you must always propose it. The Church never imposes the faith, she only proposes it. That is your mission, to propose the faith to all people through your very particular profession.

It is also true that you must find the most appropriate way to do it, and the ways differ from culture to culture, from one population to another, and more so from one individual to another. To be effective you must to be prudent and sensitive.

That is the reason why you must have Congresses like the one we are celebrating. Our Congress has as its finality to consider the more convenient way to answer the most complicated questions that arise specially in your profession in the sphere of the family, and which questions must be answered in our field of Pastoral Health Care.

Above all, when you are in the presence of incurable diseases and you encounter death you must implore the grace of God to heal not only by technical medical procedures, but also to arrive at the whole person

through faith. You, as catholic nurses must have an answer for yourselves first of all; and then for the patients and the family of the patients.

Because of your nearly daily encounter with death, it may be possible that you become indifferent and insensible in front of this terrible reality. But you must never lose sight of the deep and tremendous fact you are watching every day; not only to have compassion, but to evangelize, and communicate happiness in the ultimate moments of human existence. This is a definitive moment, the most important moment for your mission as Catholic nurses. This is the culmination of what the Church expects of your charitable work, of your evangelizing work, of the work of CICIAMS in Asia.

The conversion to the Catholic Faith is a gift that one receive from God; however, God uses His appropriate instruments, and a very appropriate instrument in Asia, are you dear nurses. Your work must in first place be to pray to God for the gift of faith for you and your patients, to manifest through your work that you are working in the health field as good Samaritans, moved by your faith and love in Jesus Christ. In this way your mission becomes a very joyful mission, that is to be announcers of the solid hope of the Resurrection of Christ. In the context of the Asian religions, the Resurrection is the participation in the divine nature, as the most complete answer to the questions, desires and expectations expressed in the myths of reincarnations, or in the anonymous fusion in a nihilist or pantheist Nirvana.

May God help us in this Congress to find appropriate ways to announce His Gospel to the multitude of non

Catholics of Asia, through the Catholic health care work of the Asian nurses.

We have received the gift of Faith in a very unmerited way: now we have the obligation to be instruments in order that God may communicate it to other people.

We are celebrating this Mass in the first Sunday of Advent. In this time we are preparing ourselves for Christmas. This is a feast that is often also celebrated by non-Christians; perhaps only for economic interests. Let them know the deep meaning of the Christmas greetings and the gifts we offer each other in this special time. Let them know this feast as the symbol of the greatest gift that God gave to mankind, His divine Son, who is born to us at Christmas to make all people of good will divine.

The Mass we are now celebrating is this mysterious reality: in it, Christ our savior offers himself to us and we become one with him by sharing from his body and blood in the Eucharist; it is His memorial, so, we assist also in it to the Incarnation, Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord; let us translate the Mass, into the very reality of the health World through the Catholic Nurses' evangelization activity. Amen.

Hong-Kong, 28 November 2005.

*+ Javier Card. Lozano
Barragán.*