

ON THE FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL APOSTLES

CARDINAL ANDRÉ VINGT-TROIS

Archbishop of Paris

Eph 2:19-22; Ps 116:1-2; Jn 20:24-29

Dear Friends,

to encounter the Risen Christ makes one part of the college of apostles. And Thomas, who was absent on Easter evening, has the benefit of a fresh encounter to take his place in this college. The accounts of the appearances of the risen Christ show this reality present all through the Gospel: Jesus gathers his apostles around himself, and he establishes them as a people organised and built around his person.

For us who do not see Christ, communion with the risen one is lived through the experience of faith. But it is indeed the presence of Christ who builds the Church across the centuries as a special people in the midst of the peoples of the earth. If the Church is international — just like your General Assembly — it does not exist simply through the exercise of mutual tolerance, or of a kind of “gentleman’s agreement,” it is not a matter of persons of all races, peoples and cultures living together, accepting not to judge each other, respecting and letting their differences coexist.

To the extent that geographic distances are wiped out and that cultures and civilizations meet more easily — at least virtually through the means of communication — this balancing of relations between human groups becomes more and more necessary. But the Church is called not simply to be the sign of a best achieved democracy and to practice the necessary rules of prudence so that peoples live in peace. Our communion in Christ and our Tradition permit us to go further, in the way Saint Paul invites us to in the letter to the Ephesians: “We are no longer foreigners or people passing through. We are citizens of a Holy People, members of the family of God. For we are members of the household of God which has for its foundation the apostles and the prophets” Eph 2:19-20. This perspective of a holy people assimilated into one family permits us to go beyond simple peaceful respect or polite coexistence. It gives

us entrance to a household in which each member brings his contribution to a unique work.

The progress of fraternal life in this body depends, therefore, on the central place we give to Christ. It is only our communion with the risen one which allows us to hold our place all together in the family of God. Therefore, our international experience in the life of the Church is more than a juxtaposition of cultures and traditions. It is the place of the generation of a new family culture to which each brings what he is, but where a new identity is also discovered. The very essence of the people that we form is not the addition of particular identities but that which communion in Christ gives us.

The aim of this is not just a good ordering of internal life of the Church, but an essential constitutive dimension of the mission we have been given. For, since the day of the Ascension, Christ's disciples are called to know him by faith, to believe in him without seeing him. But they do have something they can see: not the person of Jesus, but the fruit of his presence in the heart of the Church. The ties and the connections of love which we develop in our ecclesial life, the progressive building up of a culture of family in the Church and in all the communities which make it up, are a visible sign of the invisible presence of the risen Christ.

The mission for which we are sent is not simply to announce the message of the Gospel, nor even only, the person of Christ. We are charged with making him seen through and in the relations built among the members of his Church. Charity lived in the heart of the community is a constitutive element of the proclamation of the Gospel. It is in seeing how you love each other, that they will understand who it is who has sent you. To take up the missionary dimension of the ties which unite us, avoids closing ourselves in on our internal questions, and helps us to discover how concern and commitment to the organization of our family life opens a new way for humanity, which is not just a way of respect, but the way of love.

Amen.