

Report of Indian Mission Congress-2009

Introduction

India's first ever Mission Congress, christened Prabhu Yesu Mahotsav, on the theme 'Let Your Light Shine' was held at the St. Pius X College, Goregaon, Mumbai, India from 14th to 18th October, 2009. The general purpose of the congress was to deepen one's faith, to acknowledge one's right and duty towards the mission work and to create awareness of mission needs, providing opportunity to give public witness of Christian faith to experience the common bond of faith and Catholicity of the Church and to proclaim Christ to the world. The Indian Mission Congress brought together the three Catholic Individual Churches in India - Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara. The expected fruits of the Indian Mission Congress would bring a greater awareness on the part of every Catholic's responsibility towards evangelization thereby providing an impetus to mission work in India and a fresh stimulus to our mission efforts

1. Participants

About 1300 delegates, including 112 bishops, around 240 priests and 300 nuns representing various religious congregations and dioceses and lay leaders from 160 dioceses of India attended the Congress. There were also two participants each from all the major seminaries in the country including the rector and one representative for the seminarians.

His Beatitude Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithaythil participated in the congress from 14-16th October. Among the Syro Malabar Bishops, Their Excellencies Bishops Joseph Kunnath, Vijay Anand Nedumpuram, Thomas Thuruthimattam, Simon Stock Palathara CMI, Thomas Elavanal MCBS, Joseph Pandarasseril, Jose Porunnedom, Antony Chirayath, Paul Chittilapilly, George Alencherry and Sebastian Vadakel MST were participants of the congress, thus the total number of 12 bishops from the Syro Malabar Church. A good number of Superior/Director Generals of the religious institutes from our Church were present in the congress. All the Syro Malabar Major Seminaries also had their delegates. Almost all Syro Malabar dioceses had sent their delegates to the congress. According to the registration, there were 167 participants from the Syro Malabar Church among them 93 were delegates from the dioceses.

2. Venue of the Congress: St Pius X Seminary, Mumbai

Mumbai's 49-year old spacious St Pius Seminary in Goregaon wore a festive look with tastefully decorated conference venue, illuminations, colorful exhibition pandals, spacious food court and several stalls.

3. Inaugural Event

The Mission Congress opened with the carrying of the Holy Bible and the image of Christ in procession by secretaries of Evangelization of the three Churches, Fr. Vijay Shantiraj, Fr. Justin Vettukallel and Fr. John Berchmans. The chief guest and heads of the three Churches lit the lamp amid chanting of hymns on the theme of light. Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai as the host and the President of the Mission Congress welcomed the delegates to the city of Mumbai for the four-day event. The Church in India, he noted is having its first Mission Congress, and history is being made. He hoped that the Congress would provide them very fruitful, graceful days and give to each one "a deeper understanding of our mission as disciples of Christ."

President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and head of the Syro-Malabar Church, Major Archbishop Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil called the delegates of the first Indian Mission Congress to bear courageous witness to Christ as there is no other substitute for happiness

than the Good News of Christ. Delivering the presidential address at the Indian Mission Congress, “Prabhu Yesu Mahotsav”, Cardinal Vithayathil said, “is the fruit of collaboration of all the three ritual churches in India. Such collaboration, he said, augurs well for the church in India”. Stressing the need to be courageous witnesses of Christ today, he said, no amount of wealth or pleasure in this world can give deep and lasting joy which Christ gives. Calling for a courageous witness and proclamation of Christ and his message, he emphasized that the one who has discovered the treasure of Christ cannot keep it to oneself but is compelled from within to communicate it to others. He highlighted the importance of the media in the proclamation of this message, but underlined the need for Christians to become not only messengers but the message by authentic discipleship of Christ. He said neither Jesus Christ, nor the Catholic Church, force anybody to be converted. But he emphasized the need for rejecting intolerance of other's faith.

"The Church's mission is to spread hope continuously. This is a special mission, reasoned Archbishop Pedro Lopez Qunitana in his inaugural address. Jesus Christ's message is one of peace and love for the whole people and not meant for any particular ethnic, linguistic or regional group, said Major Archbishop Moran Mar Baselios Mar Cleemis, Catholicos, head of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church in his message at the inaugural session of the Indian Mission Congress. Most Rev. Isidore Fernandez, read out the message of the Holy Father and His Eminence Cardinal Telesphore Toppo inaugurated the exhibition. Most Rev. Thomas Dabre delivered the keynote address. Representing the other Christian communities in India, the CNI Bishop Most Rev. Prakash Patole and the Orthodox Bishop Most Rev. Geevarghese Coorilos addressed the congress.

4. Theme Presentations

Each day of the congress had a particular theme for reflection. The main speaker of the day would elaborate the theme through an erudite presentation of almost 40 mts, right in the first morning session. “I am the light of the world” was the theme of the first day presented by Rev. Fr Sebastian Kizhakkeyil, representing the Syro Malabar Church. “You are the light of the world” the theme of the second day was presented by Rev. Fr Jose Maria Das OIC from the Syro Malankara Church. The theme of the third day “Let your light shine” was presented by Most Rev. S. Singaroyan representing the Latin Church in India. If you are interested to read the whole presentation please log on to our website www.cepcm.org

5. Faith sharing

Sharing the personal faith experiences of outstanding Catholics in the country as well as their contributions/involvement in the respective activity/ministry were presented by chosen individuals from all parts of the country belonging to the three sui iuris churches in India. It was an important chance for the participants to see in person and listen to some of the outstanding witnesses of the Gospel in India through whom the light of Christ shine in exemplary and effective ways.

6. Region-wise group discussions

Every day in the afternoon, group discussions were organized in region-wise. The region wise arrangement was to bring the same language groups together and thus to make the discussions more effective. The result of the group discussions was shared right on the same day. The group discussion on the eve of the day of conclusion was to chalk out plans to make the light of Christ shine brighter in every region. Many of the regions suggested for having schools of evangelization in their regions, region wise mission congress etc.

7. Liturgical Celebrations and Prayer Services

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated in a most solemn way in all the days of the congress. The morning and evening prayers were also conducted in a solemn manner according to the liturgical traditions. The liturgies of the inaugural day and of the concluding day were celebrated in the Latin rite, officiated by His Excellency Pedro Lopez Quintana and His Eminence Oswald Gracias respectively. One representative each from Syro Malabar and Malankara Churches were concelebrants of the liturgy.

The divine liturgy of the second day was celebrated in the Syro Malabar tradition. The morning and the evening prayers were conducted in a very solemn manner with a main celebrant, deacons and choir. The language used was primarily English but the hymns were sung in Hindi. For the Syro Malabar Qurbana, His Beatitude Mar Varkey Vithayathil was the chief celebrant and Bishops Thomas Elavanal, Jose Porunnedom, George Alenchery, Paul Chittilapilly and Sebastian Vadakel were the main concelebrants. We also had one representative each from other two Churches as concelebrants. Bishop Mar George Alencherry preached the homily. “The true Christian”, he said, “preaches and professes what he believes namely the truth of the Gospel that has already converted him to God’s love. It is the same truth of the Gospel, to which the Christian bears witness by word and love that penetrates the hearts of people and causes the change or conversion of their vision of life. This is God’s work, not of man, and no one can hold it back”. Please log on to our website www.cepcm.org for the complete homily.

8. Cultural Program

The theme “Light shines among Indian Christians” was presented in cultural form in every evening. These presentations were region-wise and the Syro Malabar and the Malankara churches had one hour presentation on, ‘Light Shines among St Thomas Christians’. It was multi-media presentation including stage performance like dances, mime, skit and video clips, power point etc. The presentation was successful in portraying the history of the St Thomas Christians, the success stories in spreading the Gospel in India and around the world and in glorifying our heroes and heroines in faith. The first part of the presentation was solely on the common heritage and history of St Thomas Christians. It was presented in collaboration and in consultation with the Syro Malankara Church.

9. Exhibition

Exhibits on the life and mission of the Indian Church were displayed in flex boards along the entry ways to the main venue of the congress. The exhibition was very useful to understand the dynamism of the Church in the country and very specially to know the growth of the local churches.

The Syro Malabar church had a very extensive presentation under the title “Along the footsteps of St Thomas the Apostle”. We had altogether 69 flex boards depicting the ministry of St Thomas the Apostle, the early Christian Community and presentation on various dioceses, religious institutes, our activities, abundance of vocations, outstanding lay leaders, holy persons from the Church, our contribution to the universal/Indian Church etc. The Exhibition of the Syro Malabar Church stood out among all other presentations thanks to the thematic unity, attractive designs etc.

10. Solemn Conclusion

The congress was concluded with a solemn Eucharistic celebration and reading of the final message addressing the nation and all the Catholics in the country. Cardinal Oswald Gracias

officiated the concluding Eucharistic celebration wherein the Cardinal Toppo and the Archbishop Quintana, the Nuncio were the concelebrants. Representing the Syro Malabar Church, Bishop Mar Sebastian Vadakel, the chairman of the Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral Care of the Migrants was also one of the main concelebrants. The final message was read out to the audience by Bishop Mar Jacob Barnabas. Oswald Cardinal Gracias thanked every one for their efforts to make the congress a success and declared the congress concluded.

11. Sincere Thanks

The Syro Malabar presence and participation in the congress was praiseworthy and many appreciated our involvement through exhibitions, cultural programs, solemn celebration of the Divine Liturgy etc. It was the privilege of the Commissions for Evangelization and Pastoral Care of the Migrants to present the face of the Syro Malabar Church to the Indian Catholic Community. The commission is grateful to His Beatitude Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithayahtil for all his paternal encouragement and to all bishops of the Church for their encouragement and generous financial support to the cause. We are thankful to Rev. Fr Pauly Maniayttu of St Thomas Ap. Seminary Vadavathoor for expert guidance and assistance to the Cultural Program and the Liturgy. Rev Fr Mathew Sassery was the Director for the cultural program; he was assisted by Rev.Fr Kuriakose Azhakath. The Exhibition was designed and prepared by Rev. Fr Joseph Ayyamkanal. Rev. Fr Ashok Kollamkudy made the lyrics, composed music for the cultural program and gave training to the groups in Kalyan for signing in the Divine Liturgy. His Excellency Mar Thomas Elavanal was very supportive by providing all kinds of local assistance. We remain ever grateful to Rev. Fr Francis Elavathungal who was our local organizer for all our programs with the help of Rev. Fr Franklin Pottanickal. We are thankful to the youth and children of the Diocese of Kalyan. Almost 80 of them helped us for stage performance in the cultural program, for singing in the choir etc. The guidance and support of the Commission chairman, Mar Sebastian Vadakel and the Episcopal members Bishops Simon Stock Palathara CMI and Antony Chirayath made our participation and performance a successful one.

Fr Justin Vettukallel, mst
Secretary
Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral Care of the Migrants

Enclosure: Concluding message of the Indian Mission Congress