

Concluding Message of the Indian Mission Congress

1. "God is light in whom there is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5). At the dawn of creation, He issued the command: "Let there be light' and there was light" (Gen 1:4). At the end of time, He will gather the nations into the New Jerusalem, the city that "has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb" (Revelation 21:22). During this beautiful festival of Deepavali, the festival of lights, we 1200 delegates from 160 dioceses, together with 107 bishops of all three Ritual Churches gathered at St. Pius College, Goregaon, from October 14-18, 2009 for the first Indian Mission Congress, Prabhu Yesu Mahotsav. Our theme was: "Let Your Light Shine" (Mt. 5:16)
2. Prabhu Yesu Mahotsav has been for us a festival, a celebration of our faith in Jesus the Light of the World (Jn, 8:12). We felt ourselves blessed during these days marked by prayer, inter-ritual worship, inputs, personal testimonies, discussions and cultural activities as each of 13 regions that make up the Catholic Church of India Portrayed how the Light of Jesus has shone in its Region. Towards the end of the Congress, we feel the need of addressing this message to you our brothers and sisters in the faith.
3. During these days, we first of all contemplated the Lord Jesus, who is the light which enlightens everyone coming onto the world. (Jn. 1:9). Jesus in the Gospel of Luke begins his ministry with the words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). Jesus proclaimed the Good News that God, Our Father, loves us and has made us his children in Jesus Christ by pouring out his Spirit into our hearts (Rom. 8:14). Jesus assures us that whoever follows him will never walk in darkness (Jn. 8:12). We believe Jesus is the answer to the ancient prayer of the sages of our country: "Lead me from darkness to light".¹ In mysterious ways, he has been at work in the hearts of so many in our country down the centuries.
4. The Church, under the impulse of the Spirit, has been continuing the mission of Jesus. The mandate of the Risen Lord to his Apostles was: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15). The apostles did just that: "and they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it." (Mk. 16:20). Two Apostles, Thomas and Bartholomew brought the Good News to our own country.
5. The proclamation of the Good News is called "Evangelization". Pope John Paul II strongly affirmed: "The Church evangelizes in obedience to Christ's command, in the knowledge that every person has the right to hear the Good News of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ"². Jesus is not 'our possession- he came for all. The present Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, reminds us that sharing the Good News is the greatest service we can render to humanity³.
6. The evangelizing mission of the Church has taken different forms: One is works of mercy and compassion. She does what Jesus himself did: he proclaimed the Good News by words and by deeds as he cared for the sick and the afflicted (Mk. 1:32). Mother Teresa and so many others like her make visible the Church's commitment to evangelization through compassion. Church-run hospitals and hospices, efforts to reach out to those in prison are examples of the Church continuing the work of Jesus who " went about doing good" (Acts 10:32)
7. The developmental work of the Church is another form of evangelization. The Church cares for human beings right from the womb to the tomb as she stands for life and all that would promote life. Her work in the field of education is evidence of her interest in the all round human development. This is linked with the Church's involvement in justice issues to liberate the downtrodden and the marginalized. Through all these, the Church has contributed to building up the nation.
8. Another form that evangelization has taken in today's world is inter-religious dialogue. Living in a pluralistic world, the Church seeks to appreciate the religious richness of the others because she "rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions"⁴. Such a dialogue, as Pope John Paul II reminds us "should result in collaboration,

harmony and mutual enrichment" ⁵. Through inter-religious dialogue initiatives, the Church has striven to promote peace and harmony in our country.

9. During the Congress, we prayed over and reflected on what our calling as disciples of the Lord Jesus entails. He has called us to be the light of the world as he himself is the light. "You are the light of the world" he says to us. (Mt. 5:14). Our mission is to radiate the light of Jesus so that all persons will be illumined by his divine light.

10. As we reflected and prayed, we became even more vividly aware of the need of ourselves being re-evangelized. We realized more clearly the role of all of us, especially the laity-women and youth in particular – in the task of evangelization. Jesus proclaimed the Good News by his life. We will do the same by the witness of our lives called as we are to be "holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph.1:4). We recall the words of Pope Paul VI: "Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness" which involves "presence, sharing, solidarity" ⁶. Each of us is called to be both the messenger and the message.

11. We will proclaim the Good News by lives of humble service to all around us beginning with our homes and neighborhoods. We commit ourselves to fighting corruption in public life by the probity of our lives. To stem the tide of consumerism we will live lives marked by simplicity and contentment.

12. Finally, we will not be afraid to proclaim what Jesus means for us by word. Pope John Paul II forcefully reiterated what Pope Paul VI had said: "There is no evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed"⁷. This is a human right enshrined in the Constitution of our nation. No opposition, no fear of persecution will deter us.

13. As we have done through art and other channels, we will find new avenues of proclaiming the Good News especially through the media which offers us tremendous possibilities of reaching out widely and effectively especially to the youth.

14. Surely, we will proclaim Jesus in a manner respectful of the beliefs and religious practices of others. We will seek to be familiar with the national and religious traditions of our country discovering "with joy and reverence the seeds of the Word hidden in these traditions"⁸. We see the need of retelling the story of Jesus in an "inculturated" form- in a language and form which is meaningful to our country with its plurality of cultures and religions. In every way, proclaim we must: "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (I Cor. 9:16).

15. As we end our first Indian Mission Congress, we pray to the Holy Spirit who anointed us at Baptism asking him to empower us to bring the Good News to our beloved country. We turn in prayer to Mary, the Star of Evangelization. The Visitation shows her to us as the first evangelizer carrying Jesus within her (Lk. 1:39-45). Like her, we shall carry Jesus to a world eagerly awaiting the Good News.

1 *Tamasoma jyotirgamaya, Brihadaraka Upanishad* 1, 3.28

2 Pope John Paul II, Apoltolic Letter, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20

3 2009 Mission Sunday Message

4 Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

5 *Ecclesia in Asia*, 31

6 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nutiandi* 21

7 Quoted by John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 19

8. Vatican II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, 11

