

PRABHU YESU MAHOTSAV - Presidential Address –Indian Mission Congress, 2009 - Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil

I feel it is a great honour to be able to say a few words of presidential address at the beginning of this historic first Indian Mission Congress called Prabhu Yesu Mahotsav. As president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, I too welcome all of you to this august gathering. I congratulate the organizers of this Mahotsav for all the work they have done to organize this important meeting. I thank them on behalf of the Catholic Church in India.

Mission Congresses have taken place in different parts of the world at diocesan, regional and national levels in the past. It was during the Seventh Mission Congress in Guatemala in the year 2003 that the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, expressed his wish that such Congresses be held in all the continents of the world and every year in one of the continents.

The first Asian Mission Congress on the theme "Telling the story of Jesus to Asia" was held in Thailand in the year 2006. This first Asian Mission Congress wished that Mission Congresses' follow up be held in all the countries of Asia and thus resulted in the organization of this first Indian Mission Congress.

The unique feature of this Congress is that it is organized jointly by the three individual Catholic Churches in India, the Latin Church, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church. This is a wonderful witness to the unity of Christ's Church in its diversity. The unity of these diverse Churches with their own different catholic ecclesial traditions and at the same time with the same faith and the same sacraments and the same Supreme Head points to the authenticity and credibility of this faith.

The theme taken for the Congress is "Let your light shine: become the message and the messenger." What is this light we are talking about? It is the God-Man Jesus Christ. When human beings were yearning for a way to reach the Creator, the Creator Himself comes down in human form to show us the way to Him. This is Jesus Christ who said of Himself, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me"(Jn 14: 6) On another occasion Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). By His message of humility, self-sacrifice, love, and forgiveness and especially by His death on the cross to give grace to sinners, He proved His divine mission of achieving unity of all human beings and their salvation in His Love.

The Mission Congress is an occasion of sharing our deep joy and peace which we have as a result of believing in Jesus Christ and following His teachings. Jesus gives us a meaning to our existence in this world and to our death. No amount of wealth, pleasures, positions of honour can give us this deep joy and peace which Jesus gives us. Let us thank God for this great gift of faith in Jesus Christ.

Before His ascension into heaven Jesus called His apostles and directed them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mk 16: 15). We who have received the light of Christ, how can we put it under a bushel? We must make this light shine over the whole world, so that those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death maybe enlightened. It is this light that liberates everyone from the oppression of poverty, illiteracy, sickness, suffering, death and brings all to eternal salvation. It is this message of love that overcomes all the evils that are rampant in our nation like religious fundamentalism, atheism, materialism, consumerism, hedonism, terrorism and the like.

Jesus is a treasure which we have discovered. He speaks of the Kingdom of God as a treasure hidden in a field. One who finds it sells all his belongings to buy that land. Jesus himself is the Kingdom of God to which we must invite all our fellow human beings. We must make this treasure known to the whole world. If a cancer patient is cured by a certain medicine, will he not share with the whole world the medicine that he used for curing his cancer? Or if someone has discovered the cure of HIV/AIDS, will he not share his knowledge with all peoples of the world? We know and believe who is the cure for all the ills that oppress humanity. We know the One who is the answer to all our problems. Is it not a serious obligation for us to make known this person Jesus and His way of salvation and liberation to the whole world? When Archimedes came to know why a body floats in a liquid, did he not shout aloud Eureka, Eureka? “I have discovered.” We have to shout and proclaim to the whole world that we have discovered the solution to all our problems, both personal and national, in Jesus.

The most powerful proclamation of Jesus is the witness of a personal Christian life. The members of your family, your co-workers and all the persons whom you meet should experience the light of Christ in you. We should share with them the story of Jesus and the peace and joy experienced deep down in our hearts amidst the crosses, problems and trials of this world.

We must also organize to proclaim Jesus more effectively to as many fellow human beings as possible. This is the whole reason for which Christ called you. But we will achieve nothing unless we honestly try to live, as Jesus wants – a life of contemplation of God’s Word, a life of prayer and sacraments, especially the Eucharist. He has said, “Without me you can do nothing.” Let us always remain united to this Vine as its branches receiving from it the sap that energizes our spirit of evangelization.

Christ does not wish any of his disciples to make forced conversions to Christianity. Genuine conversions are a free choice of individuals and this must be respected. Jesus belongs to all nations and cultures. While proclaiming Christ he does not want to destroy all that is true, good and beautiful in the great religions and cultures of India. Let us recall with gratitude the work of those who preached the Good News of Jesus Christ in India in the past.

May St. Thomas the Apostle, who brought Jesus to India at the cost of his life before many countries of Europe received Jesus and St. Francis Xavier, who vigorously proclaimed Christ through tireless activity and St. Therese of Lisieux, who by her life of

prayer, sacrifice and penance gave us the example of great zeal in proclaiming Christ, pray for us and for the success and fruitfulness of this first Indian Mission Congress.