

On Youth Sunday

“The Church of Asia should be - in them and for them - the Church of the young. We turn to them as the Lord turned to the rich young man of the Gospel, loving them for all the splendid gifts that are theirs, urging them to place these gifts at the service of their brothers, inviting them to seek their fulfillment in the freedom which Christ offers to them!”

This quotation from the statements of the First Plenary Assembly of The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences held last April gives the idea of how the Church invites the youth to be bearers of the Gospel.

“The Church of the young” - this is very true. In fact, our society is a society of youth, as more than half of our population are young people. This is even more evident in our Church and this can easily be seen or proved by the great number of youth participating in our church life as well as other church activities and functions. It is indeed encouraging to see them so willing and so ready to share in the apostolate. I am really deeply impressed by their enthusiasm, their spirit of sacrifice and their eagerness to work in the Church and for the Church. All these, together with their strong sense of belonging to the Church, are good evidence to ‘prove’ that the Church today is the Church of the young.

Two years ago, in 1972, Bishop Hsu already pointed out that you, our church youth, are already playing an active part in the life of the diocese and parishes - and in fact, you set the tone of parish life. He also asked you to heed the community outside the Church and to bear witness to Christ's love from them. You are numerous and therefore full of potentiality, and with your intelligence and your good will, you will be able to plan and carry out meaningful work in fulfillment of Christ's command of loving and serving your neighbour. This in fact, is what the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences invites you to do, to place all your splendid gifts at the service of all your brothers. I wish to request the same from you on today's occasion and invite you to serve the community with true Christian love and spirit.

To be real witnesses of Christ is not an easy task. We must first know Him thoroughly, get truly acquainted with Him through prayer and the study of the Gospel and practice faithfully, in Him, what we believe. To arrive at all these, we need first of all, as Pope Paul VI says, to establish an authentic, living and happy relationship with Christ, to be reconciled with Him in loving humility, so that from this primary and constitutional harmony, the whole world of our human experience may express the need for and acquire a new potency, to reach a reconciliation in charity and justice with all men, recognizing them all as brothers and sisters. And this reconciliation extends into other vast and realistic fields: the Church

itself, human society, politics, the ecumenical movement, peace and so on. And once this reconciliation is acquired, it will be easy to bear witness to Christ.

Another important factor to bear witness to Christ to is to live the life of Christ. The eight Beatitudes: the poor in spirit, the gentle, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for what is right, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted in the cause of right, would be an excellent guideline to us. Try to reflect on these virtues and practice them in your everyday life, and believe that they will lead you to perfect Christian love and spirit. They will also help you to become the real salt of the world and the true light for all the world.

The two main points of Bishop Hsu's letter to you in 1972 were: to assure you that the Church is concerned with the situation of our present-day society, and to give you some guidelines on Christian life. They are still good today: they clearly confirm how greatly the Church hopes you will continue to be actively involved in its activities. They also tell how deeply the Church trusts you, trusts that you will have the potentials and courage to make your life, a personal testimony that Christ is in your midst.

I also realize, my dear young brothers and sister, what Bishop Hsu stated in his letter: that you have strong desire for change, and that consultation, involvement and responsibility are the necessary steps by which to integrate you into our community life as well as to instill into you a true sense of belonging.

Again, to build up this ideal, you need to examine closely and periodically your own mode of thinking, of feeling, of acting as compared to the ideal of a real follower of Christ. This fits well with the first aim of the Holy Year which the Pope calls: 'the inner renewal of man.' Man must first renew himself from the inside before he can claim to be a true follower and real witness of Christ.

So, my dear young friends, remember you are the pillars of the Church. The Church has strong faith, hope and trust in you and that is why the Statements of The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences say that the Church of Asia should be in you and for you - the Church of the young. But, remember also that you have to know your mission well enough and to work it out actively and wholeheartedly. And in order to remain always strong pillars, you have to equip yourself better with Christian love and charity and keep constantly reflecting and renewing yourself from within, as the Holy Father says in his Holy Year message: 'the inner renewal of man and 'reconciliation'.

Before I conclude this letter, let me use our Holy Father's words as an appreciation to

you for your great effort and cooperation in bringing the Gospel and in your witnessing Christ in the diocese as well as elsewhere. I sincerely wish and pray you will always keep up the good spirit and continue to be loyal bearers of the Good News to whomsoever you meet, wherever you are and in whatever you do:

‘I address myself most hopefully to the young, to whom I express my feelings of deep warmth and my paternal affection. In spirit of some rather contradictory attitudes of theirs; some exhibitionism and positions of protest, I have faith in them. It is to them, to the young, to those who are searching for new ways of personal involvement, that I would like to address the disturbing words of the Gospel: “Why do you stand here all day idle?” Their thirst for the absolute can not be sated by false ideologies or empty experiments. No, the young have within themselves the capability, the imagination, the force, the spirit of dedication and self-sacrifice to enable them to make their contribution to the salvation of their brothers: “Go you also into the vineyard.”’ (Discourse of Paul VI: 22 June 1973)

+ Peter Lei
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