



CCEE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Rome, 23-26 September 2021



Cardinal Péter Erdő

ADDRESS TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY ON THE OCCASION OF
THE 50° ANNIVERSARY OF THE CCEE

Rome, 24 September 2021

Most Eminent President, Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, dear friends,

I am happy to be here with you today so that we may thank God together for the 50 years of the Council of the European Bishops' Conferences. In particular, I wish to thank Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the CCEE for also inviting former Presidents of this continental episcopal organisation to this jubilee meeting. Our dear departed predecessors, Cardinals Roger Etchegaray, Basil Hume, Carlo Maria Martini, Miroslav Vlk and Bishop Amédée Grab are no longer with us, but I believe that they prayed during yesterday's Holy Mass, together with the Holy Father Francis, and continue to pray for us, for the Church in Europe, for the episcopal ministry we are called upon to fulfil under our own personal responsibility and in fraternal solidarity.

What is the meaning of us meeting as the continental Council of Bishops' Conferences here, in Europe, at a time characterised by a consciousness within the Church of synodality? And how can we respond to these signs of the times in the concrete European reality that is so multifaceted and complex?

Though the word synodality seems to be recent in ecclesial vocabulary, in itself synodality dates back to the beginnings of Christianity. Already the description of the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit provided in the Acts of the Apostles appears to attest to the belief in the presence of a single and common Spirit given to the Apostles as a college. We remember the book of Numbers (Num 11,16-17), where the Lord urges Moses to gather together the seventy elders of Israel and promises: "I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee". The ancient *Traditio Apostolica's* (7,2) presbyters' ordination prayer but also the current priestly ordination liturgical text refer to this. Another paleo-Christian written text, *Didascalia* (II, 26, 7), as had already Saint Ignatius of Antioch (*Magn.* 6, 1), reiterates the analogy between the college of presbyters and that of the Apostles. Later, but possibly also in parallel, the idea of the mission of the college of the Apostles continuing in the activities of the college of the Bishops was formulated. Undoubtedly, we read in the Acts of the Apostles the letter of the Apostles and Jerusalem presbyters that begins with the significant words: "It seemed good, to the Holy Spirit and to us ..." (At 15,28).

And yet, following Christ's salvific work, the Holy Spirit is poured out over all believers, as Saint Peter says in his Pentecost speech (At 2,16-21.39). Thus Joel's

grandiose prophecy is fulfilled (Jl 3,1-5). He does not speak of a transfer but rather of an extension of the calling of the people of Israel.

Christ's threefold mission continues throughout history. The entire Church continues it, as do the faithful, each in their own way according to their own condition, status and function. It behoves them to listen to what the Holy Spirit says and to put it into practice maintaining the balance of charity and the extremely close relationship between the faith of today's Church and the person of Jesus of Nazareth whose works and teachings can be known very reliably from the Books of the New Testament and the living tradition of the community that is the Church.

This great challenge, which the entire Church must meet, presents a special face in Europe. In different parts of our continent, the Church is living in radically different circumstances: in secularised societies where the majority tradition refers to Protestantism, in Latin countries with all their tensions and feelings of a "burning" Church, in former Communist countries, in regions with an Orthodox majority, but they too secularised in their own way like some Balkan countries or – in a special way – Russia too, or even in countries with an overwhelming Islamic majority like today's Turkey. Half a century of experience tells us that the great mission of the Council of this continent's Bishops' Conferences is not to build a continental "Curia" so as to govern all local Churches according to the same detailed practical criteria. It is, rather, to establish a forum of fraternal charity, where we can exchange our experiences, study developments that are vitally important, at least in some areas, strengthen each other in the same faith, listen to the joy and suffering of our confrères and seek to help according to our own abilities. Pastoral, social, economic, legal and even political conditions can be very different in different countries. The individual Bishops' Conferences attempt to deal with them according to their wisdom and possibilities. But they may count on the fraternal solidarity of us all. This also applies – and especially in Europe – to the Eastern Catholic Churches that hugely enrich the life of the Catholic Church in our old continent. A manifestation of this encounter between East and West – two words that have no concrete meaning if not in antiquity and in the European world – was the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress celebrated in Budapest two weeks ago.

The unity of local Churches and of those *sui iuris* is presided over by Saint Peter's Successor who remains the centre and principle of unity also for the Church in Europe.

I ask the Lord to bless the entire ministry of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences also in the coming decades!

Thank you for your attention!