



CARDENAL ARZOBISPO DE VALLADOLID

Greetings from the President of the Spanish Catholic Bishops' Conference

On behalf of the Spanish Catholic Bishops' Conference, I greet you with respect and affection. I am grateful for the hospitality offered to us by the Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela, the Mayor of the city, and the President of the Government of Galicia. I am certain to interpret the sentiments of the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe in stating that it is a reason for particular satisfaction for all of us to hold this Plenary Assembly in the city of Santiago de Compostela. For some time now, we have been cultivating the desire to implement this opportunity that today we are inaugurating with joy.

The city of Compostela and its cathedral church devoutly preserve the tomb and Apostolic memory of St. James, to whom the evangelization of Spain is traditionally linked. He was a disciple, Apostle, and Martyr of our Lord Jesus Christ, messenger and master of the Gospel, defender of the Church and guide of pilgrims. From the heart of Europe, countless people went on pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James, century after century, seeking the "great forgiveness" and the renewal of Christian life. "Europe came about by doing pilgrimages", wrote Goethe. In the European West, in this *Finisterre*, Santiago de Compostela was a shining star of our peoples. In recent decades, this pilgrimage has experienced an incessant and admirable growth. As the number of pilgrims is increasing year after year, the diocese of Compostela is aware of the particular mission that it has received in the context of ecclesial communion. In this perspective is also the invitation that was extended to us as presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe.

When setting out on his journey, every pilgrim carries within him expectations that in the end are not frustrated, but unexpectedly satisfied. The awakening and strengthening of their faith, a revival of their religious conscience, getting rid of paralyzing comforts, shaking off the dullness of indifference, reviving

a secular history, focusing life on what is really important, getting rid of urgencies and unnecessary burdens, taking refuge in the silence of the long journey, encouraging solidarity with other men and women, and helping those who are tired of life. Finally, when you enter the Basilica through the Portico of Glory, you rediscover that the goal of human life cannot be found in this world and in history. Santiago as a destination for pilgrims is a parable of another goal to which every man - recognizing it to a greater or lesser extent - aspires.

Near or far from us, trees and forests are cut down, causing a desertification of the earth and making life's breath more difficult. The historical memory of the Christian faith is being cut down in our Europe too. Sometimes it is transformed into museum pieces that many of our contemporaries find incomprehensible and far from their concerns. Well, the Apostolic memory of Santiago de Compostela actualizes a secular history that touches us closely. Here our roots emerge. The memory of Saint James and the secular history of the pilgrimage urge us to remember our Lord. We hear in this city near the tomb of James the words that Paul the Apostle wrote to his disciple Timothy, "Remember Jesus Christ" (2 Tm:8). This place helps to anchor the Christian faith and the religious dimension to the person of Jesus and the life path of our peoples.

The theme chosen for this Plenary Assembly of the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe that we are beginning now, "*Europe, time to wake up? The signs of hope*", finds in Santiago de Compostela a very appropriate environment for reflection and dialogue. My greetings to you all, may the Apostle guide our steps, that we may discover his footprints in Europe's present!

Santiago de Compostela, 3 October 2019

+ Cardinal Ricardo Blázquez Pérez
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