

Videoconference, 25 September 2020

**Council of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Europe  
PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

*“The Church in Europe after the Pandemic. Perspectives for Creation and Community”*

**Opening address**

**CARDINAL MARC OUELLET**

Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops

Dear President Cardinal,

Dear Brothers,

Faced with the global phenomenon of death by Coronavirus, the missed parting from our loved ones, the deprivation of the sacraments for many communities, the social and economic crisis due to the lack of work, the uncertainty concerning the ongoing pandemic, we all feel somehow lost, disoriented and in need of help and solidarity, especially in witnessing the fate of the poorest ones in misery.

As masters of the faith leading millions of believers in Europe, we are aware of the challenge to bear witness to the Hope that dwells within us and urges us to seek the appropriate way, following the example of Pope Francis, to console, encourage, motivate and support all efforts to "move forward together without leaving anyone behind".

Such a search draws on the sources of our faith, the Word of God and personal prayer, strengthened during the lockdown due to the pandemic, and hopefully pursued even afterwards under the new conditions of virtual normality. The suspension of our regular activities in social life has, in fact, paved the way for inner life and virtual creativity, as well as fostered a deeper reflection on the meaning of life and death.

Every hundred years or so, something big and unexpected occurs, capable of upsetting the life of entire communities and nations, often with a high number of deaths. In the last century, after the massacres of World War I, death struck again with the so-called Spanish influenza

epidemic and again during World War II, not to mention the less known victims caused by abortion and now by euthanasia. Death imposes its reign, causing a crisis of faith that brings our time closer to the mystery of Holy Saturday. A mystery of silence and neglect.

It is true, as Cardinal Koch wrote, that this mystery has as its dark side the experience of death, solitude, the absence of God, but it also has a bright side: Christ came down among the dead, bringing them the light of divine Love which is stronger than any other limits imposed by death and hell. Christ's resurrection has shattered the inexorability of death and made hope rise again in mankind, a hope that springs from faith. We are bearers of this hope as heralds of the Gospel, but our message is hopeful to the extent that it is preceded and accompanied by our gestures of compassion, creativity and solidarity.

Overcoming the pandemic in Europe will be the result of the collaboration of all, but a major role will be played by the active hope of Christians living in the light of the risen Christ and spreading compassionate charity to all those in need, without difference in colour, ethnicity or religion. Pope Francis has left us this message in the darkest moment of the pandemic, questioning our faith from Peter's boat and spreading the Easter blessing with the Monstrance of the Eucharist.

We are all impressed and inspired by these memories that encourage us to roll up our sleeves to imagine a better future with realism, humility, trust and above all, aware that we must bear witness to this hope for all because of the Risen One who is present amongst us. While the long Eucharistic fasting has made us lose the habit of Sunday Mass, a new evangelization is urgently needed to make Christians discover that the Eucharist is not only a spiritual nourishment for our journey, but our joyful witness to the encounter with the Risen One, who gives us the Spirit of life and courage in difficult times.

Dear brother bishops, I am pleased to greet you at the beginning of this online session, hoping for fruits of solidarity and communion to come from our work. I hope that the challenges posed by the health emergency will not discourage us, but will give our Churches the opportunity to bear witness to the Risen Lord, always alive in our midst. May His Spirit keep us confident and active in the troubled and uncertain world for the future of its communities and our common home. I wish you all the best!

+Marc Cardinal Ouellet

*Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops*