

Basilica of the National Shrine of the
Immaculate Conception
Washington, D.C.
Saturday, May 6, 2017
2:30 p.m.

MASS FOR THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC CATHOLIC NETWORK

Homily

by

His Eminence
Cardinal Donald Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington

It is a great joy and privilege for me to welcome all of you to this special pilgrimage Mass. In doing so, I greet the Asian and Pacific Catholic Network in the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area which, in collaboration with the United States of Catholic Bishops, is celebrating its 15th annual pilgrimage to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception today.

In the 15 years since the first of these pilgrimages, we have seen a continuing growth in the number of Asian and Pacific Island Catholics come to our country but we have also recognized the cultural, social and ethnic diversity represented by the many API communities. It is in this light that our Conference of Bishops has urged us to celebrate the range of gifts common to these communities. Already in 2001, the Bishops' pastoral statement, *Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony and Family*, called us to appreciate, as part of the heritage of the Asian and Pacific Island Catholics, the value of harmony amidst diversity.

We come here today in this pilgrimage to demonstrate both the richness of diversity and, at the same time, the harmony which is a unique, cultural characteristic particular to each ethnic group represented in this basilica today.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis urges the faithful to “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them” (3). For API Catholics responding to Christ can be viewed through the lens of “encountering harmony.” One of the experiences of Asian and Pacific Island Catholics is the ability to encounter Christ through a multitude of cultural experiences while seeking to reflect the peace of Christ in the harmony we share one with another.

But another aspect of the Asian and Pacific Island presence in our country has been the centrality of family with its values of solidarity, filial piety and respect for the elderly and for the ancestors. What a blessing those gifts are to an increasingly secular world that is so prepared to brush aside those very values. In fact, the Synod on the New Evangelization in 2012 spoke of our Western culture as having suffered a “tsunami of secularism” that has wiped away so many of those very values, family, marriage, filial piety, respect for the elderly and our ancestors that mark the great Eastern tradition.

A final element that I would like to note today is reflected as well in the Bishops' pastoral statement. Here we find highlighted the tradition of profound spirituality and popular piety. While all of us recognize the central place of the Eucharistic Liturgy in our lives, we also know how our faith is enriched by popular devotions. That fact explains why we have this annual pilgrimage to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

It is abundantly clear from the faith and life of the Church reflected here today that Asians and Pacific Islanders have a longstanding and profound devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this, we see a solidarity with the Catholic faithful going back all the way back to the earliest days of the Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a clear answer: "Only faith can embrace the mysterious ways of God's almighty power. This faith glories in its weaknesses in order to draw to itself Christ's power. The Virgin Mary is the supreme model of this faith, for she believed that 'nothing will be impossible with God'" (273).

Today we gather for the annual Asians for Mary Pilgrimage here in this basilica to recognize Mary's particular role in the life of the Catholic faithful in the Asian and Pacific communities. We also see how that heritage continues to be lived and loved here in our country, in America's great House of Mary.

Notable among the Asian and Pacific communities' shrines here in the Basilica are Our Lady of Camarin for Guam (the first chapel I was privileged to dedicate in 2006), Our Lady of Antipolo, Our Lady of China, Our Lady of the Korean Martyrs, Our Lady of Korea at Kana, as well as Our Lady of La Vang.

As all of the faithful have done as they approach the various figures of Mary, we, too, see with the eyes of faith. We take as our model, Mary. All of these shrines are tributes to the faith and devotion to Mary.

When we look to Mary as a guide, what do we learn? Jesus, Mary's son, came to reveal to us who God is, to teach us the meaning of life, and to show us how to live. This could not have happened, it could not have taken place, without Mary and her "yes" to God. The Word became flesh because of Mary's cooperation. Mary's role in God's plan was to be the instrument by which the Eternal Word entered our world, our history, our time and became one of us, became a human being, and took on flesh and blood. This is our first lesson. To be open to God's grace and always prepared to say, "Yes."

Everywhere we turn in this basilica, whether to meditate on the mysteries of the rosary or to reflect on the various titles explaining the action of God at work in Mary, or whether to recognize her particular place in the faith and devotional life of Catholic communities around the world, we see in Mary a manifestation of what should be our response to Christ – our "Yes" to God.

Mary is the model of what our faith should be. Like us, Mary was a human being who had to be open to hear and accept God's word and to grasp the mysterious ways in which God works. She did so with such consummate fidelity that she is forever the example of what we mean by faith — true, profound faith.

Our second lesson is to recognize God's action taking place in our world and in our lives. The challenge to live by faith brings us into confrontation with the increasingly secular world fostered by our modern culture and nurtured by much of the media. It is that challenge that makes this day and pilgrimage so significant. Together, we strengthen one another in our traditions, heritage and, as the same time, renew our faith.

As we continue our celebration today, we turn to the altar so that in faith — the same faith that gave purpose to the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary — we may encounter the Lord every bit as truly as she did. For Mary, Jesus was present physically as a child. For you and me now as we approach the altar, Jesus is truly present in the mystery of his death and Resurrection, in his Body and Blood. While we may not have the words to explain this mystery, we have the faith to embrace it.

May God continue to bless all of the Asian and Pacific Island Catholic communities and their pilgrimage to Mary's House which is a foreshadowing of our great pilgrimage together to the Father's House.