

Document: Homily of Vietnam's Cardinal Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man

XUAN LOC, Vietnam - Cardinal John-Baptist Pham Minh Man of Ho Chi Minh City has shared with fellow bishops of Asia his perspective and approach to accompanying Vietnam's people as they work to rebuild their lives and reunify their nation after war ended with the victory of communist forces in 1975.

Cardinal Man offered his reflections during a Mass that he led on Dec. 12, the second full day of the 10th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at Xuan Loc Pastoral Centre, part of a large compound of the Catholic diocese of Xuan Loc in Dong Nai Province, east of Ho Chi Minh City.

The text of Cardinal Man's homily follows:

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On the second day of our Assembly, we gather here to pray for Wisdom that helps us to discern the signs of our times. In today's celebration, please allow me to share with you some experiences of mine about the ways of receiving and living out the Word of God and His wisdom, in responding to the challenges of today's society.

In my crowded city, there are two big challenges. First, after 1975, many people and the diocese itself were suffering many losses, loss of properties, loss of freedoms. Secondly, today people live in many kinds of freedom, freedom of the market economy system, freedom of the struggle for life, freedom of the race to consumerism and hedonism, freedom of abortion, of divorce... These freedoms open the way to economic development and at the same time to many social evils. They render the gap between rich and poor bigger, the spiritual desertification more arid.

1. My first experience. After fifteen years of living and ministering in Ho Chi Minh City, I feel that Jesus always accompanies us, as He did with the two disciples of Emmaus. He is changing sufferings and despair into opportunity for the people of God to share with others our life of faith. So, in all situations and difficulties, I keep firm faith in Jesus, listening and keeping His Word in my heart, bringing the light of His Truth and Love into my daily thinking and acting. And I experience that His Truth and Love give us strength to overcome fears in our life, to be patient in our prayer, to be humble in our ministry, and to be clear-sighted in serving the life and dignity of all people, especially the poorest among the poor.

2. My second experience. I feel that the Holy Spirit is working to renew our mind and open our heart to respond to the challenges of social life. So I keep cooperating with Him, helping the people of God, not to be in the right wing or in the left wing, but to walk on the path of Christ, integrating into the cultural tradition, finding in it the seeds of the Word of God, and with it building up the culture of life and civilization of love for our society. I believe that is the way by which Jesus and His Church are proclaiming the Good News and opening for everybody the road to new life in the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Love and Peace.

3. Thirdly, I experience that, with the help of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and after the example of our Blessed Mother and our martyrs, instead of closing themselves in a self-defense attitude, the people of God open their mind and heart to respond to God's call to love all human beings, believers and non-believers, left wing and right wing, rich and poor, especially those in difficulties.

4. Finally, in my overpopulated city, I feel that there are so many people in need of the living water of Christ. And responding to this need is the responsibility of all Catholics. Therefore, I keep helping every Catholic family and community, first to become the well where Christ is willing to share His Living Water to everybody, and secondly to become messengers of the Good News, sharing joy, faith and hope with their friends and neighbors. I keep doing it, not alone, but with the cooperation of our priests, religious and lay associations, and with hope in our loving God.

So, may we become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit who is working in the deepest aspirations of our peoples, in our cultures and in venerated religious traditions on the continent of Asia. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit guides us to walk on the path of Christ, and to offer the abundant life to our peoples in Asia.

May God bless all of us!

Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2012
John B. Pham Minh Man

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