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Message of the Holy Father to the President of the Spanish Episcopal Conference on the occasion of the National Congress of the Laity (Madrid, 14 to 16 February 2020)

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to His Eminence Cardinal Ricardo Blázquez Pérez, president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, on the occasion of the National Congress of the Laity taking place in Madrid from 14 to 16 February on the theme: "The People of God going forth":

Message of the Holy Father

To the Most Eminent

Cardinal Ricardo Blázquez Pérez

President of the Spanish Episcopal Conference

Dear brother,

I am addressing you, as well as dear Cardinal Carlos Osoro Sierra, archbishop of Madrid, and all the brother bishops, priests, religious and, in a particular way, the lay faithful, on the occasion of the National Congress that you are celebrating with the theme: "The People of God going forth"

To reach this celebration they have travelled a long road of preparation, and this is beautiful, to walk together, to make a "synod", sharing ideas and experiences from the different realities in which they are present, to enrich themselves and to make grow the community in which one lives grow.

It is significant that you begin this Congress on the day that the Church remembers Saints Cyril and Methodius, patrons of Europe. They promoted great evangelization in this continent, bringing the message of the Gospel to those who did not know it, making it understandable and close to the people of their time, with a new language

and forms. With their ingenuity and their witness, they were able to bring the light and joy of the Gospel to a complex and hostile world. The fruit was to see how many believed and adhered to the faith, forming a community; a portion of the People of God began to walk in that wide region of the continent, and continues to do so even today under the protection of those two evangelizing brothers.

This teaches us – as the motto of the Congress affirms – that we are the People of God, invited to live the faith, not individually or in isolation, but in community, as a people loved and willed by God. We belong to Him, and this implies not only having been incorporated into Him through baptism, but living in coherence with that gift received. To do this, it is essential to be aware that we are part of a Christian community. We are not just another group, nor an NGO, but the family of God gathered around the same Lord. Remembering this leads us to deepen our faith every day: a gift that is lived in the liturgical action, in the common prayer of the whole Church, and which must be announced. It is the people called together by God, who walk under the impulse of the Spirit, Who renews them and makes them return to Him, again and again, to feel that they are His own.

And this emerging People of God lives in a concrete history, which no one has chosen, but which is given to them, like a blank page on which to write. It is called to leave behind its comforts and take a step towards the other, trying to give a reason for hope (cf. *1 Pt 3:15*), not with prefabricated answers, but with incarnated and contextualized ones, in order to make understandable and accessible the Truth that, as Christians, moves us and makes us happy.

Therefore, we need that inner freedom so as to let ourselves be touched by the reality of our time and to have the courage to go out and meet it. The missionary mandate is always current and returns to us with the same strength as always, to make the voice of the Gospel resound ever new in this world in which we live, particularly in this old Europe, where the Good News is suffocated by so many voices of death and despair.

The living Word of God needs to be preached with passion and joy through Christian witness, so as to break down even the highest walls that isolate and exclude. It is time for you, men and women engaged in the world of culture, politics, industry... by your way of life, may you be able to bring the novelty and joy of the Gospel wherever you are. I encourage you to live your own vocation immersed in the world, listening, with God and with the Church, to the heartbeat of your contemporaries, of the people. And I ask you, please, to avoid at all costs the “temptations” of the laity within the Church, which can be: clericalism, which is a plague and encloses them in the sacristy, as well as competitiveness and ecclesial careerism, rigidity and negativity... which suffocate the specific call to holiness in today’s world.

Therefore, do not be afraid to pound the streets, to enter every corner of society, to go out to the city limits, to touch the wounds of our people... this is the Church of God, who rolls up her sleeves to go out to meet the other, without judging or condemning him, but rather reaching out to him, to support, to encourage or simply to accompany him in his life. May the Lord’s command always resonate with you: “Go ... and make disciples of all nations” (*Mt 28: 19*).

I encourage you in your task and your effort, and I pray to the Lord that this Congress may bear abundant fruit.

And, please, I ask you to pray for me.

May Jesus bless you and may the Holy Virgin keep you.

Faternally,

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 14 February 2020

Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Patrons of Europe.

