

CONCELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST
Homely delivered in the Cathedral of Saint-Patrick,
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Ex 1,8-14.22 ; Mt 10,34-11,1

1. Welcome and Introduction

Your Most Reverend Eminence, distinguished authorities, dear participants in this 25th General Assembly of IFCU, dear faithful followers of the Melbourne community, dear brothers. We are here today to celebrate the Eucharist in this magnificent neo-Gothic cathedral, the heart of this Archdiocese. It was built in honor of the minor Basilica during the pontificate of the blessed Paul VI in 1974 (nineteen seventy four) and received the visit of Saint John-Paul II in 1986 (nineteen eighty six).

The altar which symbolizes Christ's resurrection is a powerful invitation to us all to renew our faith and anchor in the mystery of Christ Resuscitated the studies and reflections we will carry out in the next few days when we shall broach important topics concerning the mission of the Catholic Universities in the world in the training of the young generations.

The liturgical readings of today will guide our meditation and our prayers.

2. Liberation and Fidelity

The passage of the first reading, taken from Exodus, describes the epic of the saving of Israel, freed from the bondage of Egypt and with whom God reaches an alliance. The exodus is an ode to the salutary God, the poem to the God of Israel, who, hearing the cries of his people, descends to free them. These people, once freed, will no longer be subject to the service of the Pharaoh, but to the Lord (cf *DT 4,20*).

The verses read today present the submission of the Hebrews to « another king » of Egypt, that is to say a different pharaoh from the one who had offered Joseph the role of prime minister of the country. A pharaoh who had not known him (v. 8). Distrustful of this foreign people who grew and multiplied in his country, he imagined that one day these men could rise against the Egyptian people or establish an alliance with its enemies (vv. 9s). Pharaoh therefore decides to take measures: he imposes exhausting forced labor on them in order to weaken their strength and employs them in the building of two reservoir cities in the Nile Delta (v. 11). The Egyptians made the lives of the Israelites very hard, putting them into slavery and ordering them to make bricks of clay. Yet, the greater the shortages they suffered, the more they multiplied (v. 12). Realizing that this system did not function as foreseen, Pharaoh had the idea of another inhuman and cruel way of decimating and reducing Israel to nothing: the killing of boys at birth (v. 22).

It is in this context of injustice and suffering that the great salutary act of God will develop, whose eminence is in keeping with the sadness and despair of the people of Israel.

The text of the Gospel according to Matthew is a very difficult passage because of its apparent contradiction. Jesus, who will later say that we must learn from him because he is "gentle and humble of heart" (*Mt 11,29*), now says that « *I did not come to bring peace, but a*

sword » (10,34). How can one reconcile these two extremes? What meaning can one give to his words? In these cases, it is the literary context that helps one to find the right understanding.

In our case, the word of Jesus expresses itself in the context of the persecution of faith in Christ. In fact, he himself had said « *everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father* ». This shows that the division between members of a same family does not arise because of questions of temperament, decision or personal struggles, but according to fidelity or not towards Christ. Certain people will believe in him, others not. In this, Jesus came to bring division, that is to say, he is himself a reason for discord among men, among those who believe and those who reject faith.

The text of the Scriptures is very clear. The Gospel preaches peace and harmony, but when it deals with true faith in Christ or our adhesion, it prefers division, contrast, and we could go so far as saying intolerance to the benefit of those who will have followed him or believed in him. That is why, and always in the same line of thought, Jesus will be placed above all values, including the most sacred values of the family. I must add that, in order to follow him, we need the cross and renouncement, we must be ready to give our own existence. These requirements may seem excessive, were it not for the truth they bear and for the excellence of He who pronounced and required them, a sign of his authority and his supremacy on all things.

3. The Exodus today

At the beginning of the 25th General Assembly of IFCU, the text of today's liturgy is a precious guide for our work and gives us some keys for the subjects to be broached.

The passage of Exodus describes the dramatic situation of the Hebrews faced with the social and political changes provoked by the pharaoh's succession: a change that provoked an identity crisis and changed the destiny of an entire people. The Hebrews were immigrants, pushed to install themselves in Egypt to survive hunger and poverty provoked by years of drought. Foreigners who, after having settled in another country, are oppressed, but maintain a strong sense of ethnic and religious belonging which gives them a specific identity. It is a drama that repeats itself and crosses all the centuries of history right up to today. A migrant who settles in another country brings with him his language, his customs, his habits, his culture, his system of values that he does not wish to lose because they constitute his personal and social identity: it is precisely this identity that gives this sense of belonging and helps to overcome difficulties and conflicts.

Exodus is the tale of the liberation of a migrant people who is the victim of oppression and slavery. The God of Exodus is therefore a God who frees the oppressed, fighting evil in all its forms and liberating men. This book of the Holy Scriptures explains the divine intervention motivated by compassion. Above all, it indicates that the salvation offered by the God of the Bible is above all human initiative and remains independent of all particular merit.

We are in Australia, a land marked by immigrations, and this, together with the text of Exodus, remind us that, today, many regions of the planet are witnessing new waves of migration, such as those of the *boat people* of Burma or those who are fleeing poverty in Bangladesh, wandering in lost boats from so many countries or the phenomenon of the many groups of North Africans who risk their lives during a crossing of the Mediterranean to Europe, seeking a new life. On these same seas full of immigrants, many others sail as tourists, admiring the beauties of nature.

These contradictions and dramas of the migration phenomena, with all their problems, entail huge challenges, be they to our conscience as believers or, as we well know, to society,

politics, and national and international institutions. The history of salvation has become a concrete action with the tragedy of the bondage of a people in a foreign land. A Christian must always be questioned by the Word of God and, more especially by Jesus' phrase: «I was a stranger and you invited me in» (*Mt 25,35*). Although these words do not offer a practical solution to every problem, they cannot be forgotten, since they summarize so well the mystery of Jesus. He clearly presented himself as a «stranger», who experienced as much rejection as reception, feeling it in his real historical life (cf. *Lc 9,53; 10,38*) as well as in all its mystery. We cannot forget the awe that the meetings with Jesus inspire; experienced during his public life with the non-Hebrew strangers in whom he discovered an unexpected faith and a true need for salvation. Jesus, who let himself be provoked by the encounter with strangers, becomes an example that calls on us not to fear the stranger, be it in personal encounters or in the welcome in our university institutions that are open to all and ready to offer each of us an educational project that is tied to the culture of encounters that lead to hope, offering the necessary instruments to build a new society.

4. Fidelity to the fire of Jesus

« I came to bring fire... », says the Gospel of Jesus, a marginal and poor Hebrew descended from the cross and mercifully invited by the women, by Joseph of Arimathea, by Nicodemus. Jesus said he brought fire and the sword; it is the subject of the divine mercy that tests human logic and gives birth to a new set of values, the fruit of the project of love of God the Father. Cardinal Roger Etchegaray recently declared: « Mercy is a kiss that burns. Divine mercy is the face of the love of God when it is united with the misery of man, with suffering, with sin [...] And mercy bears its fruit when men, loved up to forgiveness, brings mercy upon himself ».

During our Assembly, we must reflect deeply upon, the changes brought about by culture and the present, on the challenges they present for the training processes. In this sense, we cannot forget what Saint John Paul II wrote twenty-five years ago in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* about the tasks of the Catholic universities. He said: « through research and teaching they help to find the ancient and new treasures of culture in a way that is adapted to modern times, "*nova et vetera*", according to the words of Jesus. » (n. 10).

The transformation of our epoch, which seems to create doubts and a lack of orientation, questions even more the mission of the Catholic Universities which are called upon to establish themselves as places of teaching and research and not of « neutral » and indistinct knowledge, but as communities of professors and students who share values of life and promote intellectual pathways and an experience that is inspired by a context of cultural and religious pluralism. Faced with national selfishness, the deficit of democracy, conflicts that unsettle whole geographical regions, and pitiless and blood-thirsty terrorism, it becomes necessary and urgent to make known via the universities the social thought of the Church that has matured and been consolidated for centuries as a heritage that is in a position to regenerate mankind.

The fire that Jesus came to bring to Earth is at the heart of the Christian invitation that Pope Francis sends us in the *Motu proprio Misericordiae vultus* and that he invites us to experience during the next Jubilation year. Mercy is the justice that is specific to God, different from that of the world. It is an essential word with which he summarizes and delivers the message of the Council so that we serve Man with confidence and courage, whatever his status. Making charity a concrete reality, according to the Pope, is not a matter of sole individual behavior, but also of all expressions of the Christian community, since mercy is the cornerstone that supports the life of the Church.

For our academic communities, this is a strong stimulus to deepen the social and cultural dimension of mercy, to teach the young generations to fight corruption (n. 19) and the new forms of slavery (n. 16) ; to promote a new culture of mercy and of forgiveness (n. 10) that counters the

globalization of indifference and erases all self-centered individual conscience enclosed in its narcissism, so that it opens up to the « you » and « us ».

In this Eucharist, let us entrust to the Lord our wishes and good intents by invoking the grace of the Holy Spirit so that our work be the fire of love that makes truth resplendent.