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Press Conference to present the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress (IEC2024)

This morning, at 11.30, a press conference was held in the Holy See Press Office to present the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress (IEC2024), to be held in Quito, Ecuador, from 8 to 15 September 2024, on the theme “*Fraternidad para sanar el mundo*” (“Fraternity to heal the world”).

The speakers were: Archbishop Alfredo José Espinoza Mateus, S.D.B., of Quito, president of the local committee; Fr. Juan Carlos Garzón, secretary general of IEC2024; and Fr. Corrado Maggioni, S.M.M., president of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of Archbishop Alfredo José Espinoza Mateus, S.D.B.

Almost nine years ago, on 8 June 2015, the Holy Father Francis, in his visit to Ecuador, specifically at the Shrine of the *Virgen de El Quinche*, in the meeting he held with bishops, priests, consecrated persons and seminarians, posed a question, which comes to mind at this moment: “*I asked Jesus several times in prayer: ‘What is it that is so distinctive about this people?’ And this morning, praying about it, I was struck by the consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I think I should offer this to you as a message from Jesus: all this richness that you have, the spiritual richness of piety and great depth, has come about because of the courage you have shown in very difficult moments when the nation was consecrated to the Heart of Christ, that human and divine Heart which loves us so dearly... Years later came the consecration to the Heart of Mary. Do not forget: that consecrated is a milestone in the history of Ecuador’s people. I see that you have received this grace from such a consecration, the grace of piety that makes you unique*”.

And it is precisely the celebration of ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS of the Consecration of Ecuador to the Sacred Heart of Jesus that, in 2014, the Bishops of Ecuador, gathered in Plenary Assembly, with my vote included since I had already been Bishop for three months, ratified the request to the Holy Father that Ecuador, Quito in particular, be the host of the 53rd Eucharistic Congress in the year 2024.

On 20 March 2021 we received with profound joy the official announcement that the Holy Father Francis had designated the city of Quito to host the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress, on the occasion of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Consecration of Ecuador to the Heart of Jesus. His words were a real challenge, and I dare say that they marked and illuminated the Eucharistic Congress from that moment: *“In this ecclesial meeting the fruitfulness of the Eucharist will be manifested for evangelization and the renewal of faith in the Latin American continent”*.

The Eucharistic Congress to be held in Quito should be that voice with a Latin American accent for the Church of the whole world. It will be a voice of hope that announces itself from this Continent of Hope. It will seek to be that prophetic voice that will proclaim to all that Fraternity is the only possible way to make and build a new world.

“Fraternity to heal the world” was the theme chosen by Pope Francis for this Eucharistic Congress. We know that there are many wounds in the world, we cannot deny them. The men and women of today suffer from these wounds. Do we know how to look at our suffering brothers and sisters? Do we know how to listen to the voice of those who cry out from their wounds? Do we know how to heal these wounds? Are we ready to be “Eucharistic missionaries” of fraternity?

We are convinced that this is the great challenge of our Congress, as the Basic Text clearly tells us: *“Quito, a city in the middle of the world, located at zero latitude, extends its tent to become an immense Eucharistic tent where we are all invited to share this great dream of a fraternity redeemed and healed by the total love of Christ. Pope Francis exhorts us: ‘Let us dream as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all’ (Basic Text # 10).*

This is the deep meaning of the Eucharistic Congress. The Eucharist leads us to be builders of Fraternity. The Basic Text affirms that, *“Once the celebration of the Mass ends, the liturgical assemblies disperse slowly and scatter like seeds in the furrows of the earth. After listening to his Word, sharing the same Bread and drinking from the same Cup, Christians return to their homes, schools, offices, trade, places of leisure, tracing new paths that through the network of fraternity build the Kingdom” (Basic Text #49).* The Eucharistic Congress will make us fully aware that we are “Eucharistic missionaries of Fraternity” and together we will raise the Psalm of Fraternity: *“Help us, Lord, to be Church in the synodal journey, always brothers and now without hatred, selfishness or rancour, let us taste the intimate peace of dialogue and love, you the balm that heals wounds, wounds of the world that cry out to you” (Basic Text #58).*

They will come to Quito from the five continents; from now, “La Carita de Dios”, as the Ecuadorian capital is called, opens its doors to them and says WELCOME!

Intervention of Fr. Juan Carlos Garzón

On 25 May 2022, Pope Francis approved the theme of the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress in Quito, 2024: “Fraternity to heal the world”, illuminated with the biblical text “You are all brothers” (Mt 23:8). This theme evokes the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* and coincides with the ecclesial meaning of the Eucharist, source of communion for those who celebrate it, with its mission to make Christ's healing work visible in the wounds of the world.

The Basic Text was drawn up by the Theological Commission of the Eucharistic Congress and the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses. The intention of the document is to highlight ‘the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. Its purpose is to foster theological deepening, spiritual renewal and the good of the particular Church.

The Text consists of three parts, with an introduction and conclusions. The Introduction of the Text reminds us of

a dream of fraternity: today we experience the urgency of a fraternity that springs from the Eucharistic experience and tends towards it as its goal. The themes of each of the parts of this Basic Text speak for themselves of this longed-for fraternity.

The first part is entitled: "A wounded fraternity: 'Where is your brother?'" (*Gen 4:9*).

"'Where is Abel, your brother?' (*Gen 4: 9*). This was the question that God addressed to Cain after he had killed his brother. This question came down from heaven after the cry of Abel's blood rose from the ground. It is a question that resonates eternally reminding us of the original human vocation and of all creation to brotherhood" (*Basic Text*, 12).

"There is a wounded humanity all around us. We notice there are many wounds remaining open, while new wounds afflict the world we live in. If they are covered up, then end up becoming infected. Thus fear, rejection, contempt and insensitivity turn into xenophobia, violence, exclusion, marginalization, elimination of the unborn child and the elderly; in short, destruction of the common home" (*Basic Text*, 19); therefore, "in our historical time everyone has the task to explore the theme of fraternity" (*Basic Text*, 21). We conclude this first part with the witness of Msgr. Óscar Romero.

In the second part, the theme is framed in the context of "Fraternity realized in Christ: 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!' (*Ps 133:1*)".

"The privileged place of our bodily unity with the Lord and among ourselves, its new foundation, is undoubtedly the liturgical action and, in particular, the Eucharistic celebration, especially on Sunday. It is there that the Christian community guards the truth of the relationships expressed in charity and it is there that the path towards the concrete realization of human brotherhood is opened" (*Basic Text*, 25).

"The Eucharist offers healing to the world wounded in fraternity. Where sin has caused us to ignore each other as brothers and has placed us in a relationship of opposition and rivalry, the Eucharist calls us to sit at the same table of the Body and Blood of Christ as children of the same Father and, therefore, brothers and sisters of one another" (*Basic Text*, 30). In this second part of the Basic Text, we encounter the witness of Brother Antonio de Montesinos.

The third chapter is entitled "Fraternity to heal the world: 'Give them something to eat yourselves' (*Lk 9:13*)".

"'The Church lives from the Eucharist' and the Eucharist heals the world, therefore we necessarily have to turn our gaze to the Christian community, to the Church, a community of men and women whom the Lord gathered to be with Him and to bring the bread of his Word and of his Body to all nations. This is in accord with Jesus' humble and tender command: 'feed them yourselves' (*Lk 9:13*). Men and women who, following their own vocation, are sent as salt and light, as yeast in the dough, called to be the memory and ferment of this healing in the midst of the world. The healing power of the Eucharist is effective in the witness given by Christians being that fraternal community, that outgoing Church that lives the mandate of Christ" (*Basic Text*, 48).

"The Eucharist truly heals our way of loving. In Christ's prayer we all have a special place because we are all called to communion: 'May they all be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you' (*Jn 17:21*). And at the same time, this new 'we' of the Eucharist does not remain closed in a cenacle: Eucharistic love overflows to heal the wounds of the world" (*Basic Text*, 54). This third chapter is illuminated with the witness of Msgr. Leonidas Proaño.

Intervention of Fr. Corrado Maggioni, S.M.M.

The history of the fifty-two International Eucharistic Congresses attests to the incidence of these events in the

countries that have hosted them and offers a 'historical' vision of Eucharistic theology, liturgy and spirituality in the course of time and in various cultures (cf. V. Boccardi, *Eucaristia, Chiesa e mondo. I Congressi Eucaristici Internazionali. Lineamenti di storia*, Vatican Publishing House, 2021, 768 pp.).

A look at the history

Starting with the first International Congress in Lille, in 1881, all the following ones were characterized by impressive demonstrations aimed at confirming faith in the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist and increasing Eucharistic worship. The Congress movement had matured in France in the wake of the spirituality of St. Pierre-Julien Eymard (+1868), of influential priests such as Blessed Antoine Chevrier (+ 1879) and Gaston-Adrien de Ségur (+ 1880), of fervent lay people, including Léon Dupont (+ 1876) and in particular Émilie Tamisier (+ 1910), the animator of the Work of Congresses. From the very beginning, the role of the lay people, women and men who believed in it seriously and made their energies available, was decisive.

The Eucharistic Congresses gradually became more international and missionary in character, crossing the borders of European countries: The Congresses of Montreal (1910), Chicago (1926), Sydney (1928), Carthage (1930), Buenos Aires (1934), Manila (1937), Rio de Janeiro (1952), Bombay (1964), Bogotá (1968), Melbourne (1973), Philadelphia (1976), Nairobi (1985), Seoul (1989), Guadalajara (2004), Québec (2008) Cebu (2016) attest to this. These were events that "eucharistically" marked the path of the Church in these countries and in their respective continents. Considering Latin America, one can recall the Congress of Buenos Aires in Argentina, on the theme "The Social Kingship of Christ through the Eucharist" (1934), of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil on the theme "The Eucharistic Kingdom of Christ the Redeemer" (1955), of Bogotá in Colombia on the theme "*Vinculum caritatis*", with the historic journey of Paul VI and his meeting with 300,000 Latin American *campesinos* (1968), of Guadalajara in Mexico on the theme "The Eucharist, light and life of the new millennium" (2004). Now the 53rd Congress in Quito, Ecuador, resounds as a decisive call to "fraternity" seen as a gift from Heaven and at the same time as a human commitment to converting inimical relationships into fraternal ties, within the travails of the present. The change of epoch we are living through has led everyone, albeit in different ways, to mature in the conviction that "no one is saved by themselves", as Pope Francis loves to repeat.

What is a Eucharistic Congress today?

The re-comprehension of the Eucharistic Mystery that began with the liturgical movement and matured with the Second Vatican Council has also redirected Eucharistic Congresses to promote the inseparable bond between the Mass and the Eucharistic cult outside of it, paying attention to the lived experience. The Eucharistic Congress thus became an opportunity to express the Church of the Eucharist in the light of Vatican II and the liturgical reform that followed.

This was taken into account in the renewed *Rite of Communion outside Mass and Eucharistic Worship* (1978), which dedicates nos. 109 – 112 to the Congresses, giving indications first of all on the meaning of the Congress, understood as a "pause for prayer and commitment"; it then reminds us of the elements to pay attention to in the preparation: catechesis on the Eucharist, "especially as the mystery of Christ living and working in the Church"; participation in the liturgy "that promotes religious listening to the word of God and the fraternal sense of community"; initiatives of evangelical ferment and the realization of social works "that favour human promotion and the due communion of goods, including temporal ones"; finally, the inspiring criteria of the Congress are recalled: "let the Eucharistic celebration be the centre and summit of all the various manifestations and forms of piety"; let the exploration of the proposed theme in various ways favour practical involvement; prayer meetings and prolonged adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in specific churches of the city; the procession with the Blessed Sacrament must be exemplary.

The Internationality of the Eucharistic Congress

The idea of calling people from various countries to the Congress to celebrate the Eucharist and reflect on its ecclesial and social significance, had from the beginning the intention of reviving the awareness that the presence of Christ among us and through us is the heart of the Church and her mission. It concerns in fact all

Churches, every parish, in all countries. Gathering together for the Eucharist, with different sensitivities, cultures, histories, in spite of linguistic differences, perhaps with wounds still open from fratricidal hostilities, means focusing on the only leaven capable of truly leavening human history, making it new substance for the Kingdom of Heaven.

The internationality of the Congress manifests the universality of the Eucharistic Mystery that shapes every baptized person, in his or her state of life, like every Christian family, religious community, parish, diocese. The city of Quito will be decorated festively and spread its tents to host, at the 53rd Eucharistic Congress, delegations from the various Churches around the world, especially from Latin America; registration is open on the web page www.iec2024.ec

Until the advent of the World Youth Days, then of the Family, today also of Children, each with its own characteristics, the International Eucharistic Congress was the world ecclesial event capable of bringing together thousands of people from all continents. Even today, it must be said that it has preserved, unlike other events, the imprint of a convocation of “people”, of the holy people of God called by vocation to welcome everyone without discarding anyone, as Pope Francis reminds us. In this spirit, the concluding mass of the Congress is called “*Statio Orbis*” because it gathers believers from all over the world in prayer.
