

## **Homily**

### **CCEE Congress, Rome, Domus Maria.**

7 May 1012 at

Readings: Acts 14.5-18  
John 14.21-26

Today, in our meeting, we have been reflecting upon the journey of faith, the journey we all make towards maturity in faith and in life. This journey, we know, is made up of many steps and has both its human and spiritual dimensions.

In our journey towards human growth we have to take many steps to overcome our innate self-centredness. So much in our lives, as children too, is centred on our own needs and desires. We learn only slowly to move beyond this to a less self-centred way of life.

An elderly Sister once told me that the secret of growing up is to move from loving what we think we have chosen to loving what we have actually been given. The life of a priest, for example, can begin with a clear view of the kind of priest he is going to be and the kind of parish he will serve. Sooner or later we have to leave those ideas and learn to love the kind of priest in fact we are and the actual parish to which we have been sent. For married people there may well be a similar journey: from choosing the one I am going to love, to loving the one I have been given! And the same may be true for parents: they may choose to have a child whom they will love, but soon they have to learn to love the child they have been given.

On this journey we have to leave behind many false expectations, indeed one might say many 'false gods'.

This is what Paul speaks about in our first reading. He says to the people that he has come to help them to 'turn away from empty idols to the living God.' Indeed the people treat Paul and Barnabus as gods, for they want to choose them to meet their own expectations. But it is not so.

In this journey of growth to maturity, in life and in faith, the key quest is growth in our relationship with God in and through the Word made flesh. He is the fullness of life, the Word of life and in him lies our fulfilment, too.

The passage from the Gospel of John tells us a great deal about how this relationship grows. It starts in God, for it is God who makes the first move. God offers us the Word. Our part is to receive the Word. And our decision to do so, or not to do so, is decisive.

To receive the Word, to receive Christ, is to enter a relationship with God, with the entire mystery of God. As St John makes clear, to receive Christ is to receive the Father, for the Father is the one who has sent the Word, for the Word is of God. It is also to enter into a relationship with the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is the one who is sent by the Father and the Son.

So, receiving the Word, entering into this relationship with God, is to enter into the very life of the Trinity, and this dimension of the journey in faith which we are considering must always be kept before our minds.

The Trinitarian dimensions of this relationship are crucial, for in relationship with the Father we come to understand who we truly are, where we have come from and what our destiny really is; in relationship with the Son we come to grasp what we are to know and how we are to live; in relationship with the Holy Spirit, we come to see how it is possible for us to live as we must and to grow as we are summoned. The Holy Spirit makes it all possible.

So, in order to understand the full dimensions of the relationship with God which lies at the heart of Christian initiation we have to be aware of its Trinitarian character and make this clear in our catechetics and prayer. This is an essential part of our task.

In this same Gospel passage Jesus introduces us a little more to the Holy Spirit. He speaks of the Spirit as his ally and as our teacher. 'The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said.' (John 14.26)

There are two lessons to be drawn from this. The first is that we are to remember that we are always learners. This teaching role of the Holy Spirit is constant, for all of our time. We are always learning more about the love, the goodness, the mercy, the justice of God. We should never imagine that we possess the truth. Rather we should strive and pray to be possessed by the truth, under the guidance of this divine Teacher.

The second thing we draw is that, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we will always be drawn to look again and again at the person of Jesus, looking to his words and deeds. The Holy Spirit helps us to recall all that Jesus said and did, and the same Spirit will help us to discover the meaning of those words and deeds for our own time and place. The Spirit will guide our actions just as the Spirit guides our minds.

May this Congress, in all that we do, be deeply rooted in the Lord, be a true adventure in our growing in truth and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

+Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster