

Daily Report – Friday 11.09.2015

The singing of the *Veni Creator Spiritus* opened the annual Plenary Assembly of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE) yesterday afternoon, taking place in the Holy Land at the *Domus Galilaeae*, the formation centre of the Neocatechumenal Way on the Mount of the Beatitudes overlooking Lake Tiberias in Galilee.

The meeting, with the participation of the Presidents of all the Bishops' Conferences in Europe, that great Europe which goes from the Atlantic to the Ural mountains, from the Mediterranean to the Sandinavian countries, is taking place in the land where Christianity was born and developed at the invitation of the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land and its President, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, **Fouad Twal**.

Up to Wednesday 16 September, more than 40 bishops who have gathered in Galilee will discuss the challenges facing the Church in Europe, undertaking a meeting-pilgrimage which will lead them to meditate on the Person of Jesus at various shrines from Galilee and then to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Palestine.

"To rediscover the source of identity as people of God and our mission as successors of the Apostles, sent to give witness to the encounter with the face of the Father's Mercy who is Jesus himself", is how **Cardinal Péter Erdő**, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest in Hungary and President of CCEE, explained the presence of the European bishops in the Holy Land, in opening the work of the Assembly this afternoon. "So we meet on pilgrimage, to reaffirm our "Yes" to the Lord Jesus as European bishops", Cardinal Erdő added. In his introduction, the CCEE President touched on a number of issues which will be discussed by the episcopal gathering.

In his greetings His Beatitude Fouad Twal recalled the plight of migrants and refugees "who knock on our doors in search of peace, work and a decent quality of life." In Jordan, the Patriarch recalled "the Church and the faithful have been submerged by the arrival of mass of Syrian refugees and Iraqis." "In Israel we live the drama of many Asians who come to look for a regular or irregular work and there is no law to defend them; we also have the drama of Christians who emigrate, leaving the country in search of decent and really free living conditions. "

Subsequently, the apostolic nuncio in Israel, the Italian bishop Giuseppe Lazzarotto, read the message that Pope Francis has sent to the European episcopate. He greeted the choice of European bishops to perform their meeting in the Holy Land, seeing in it an anticipation "of what the Pope wants for the next World Day of Peace: 'Overcome indifference, win peace'."

The first part of the meeting then concluded with the reading of the message which **Pope Francis** sent to the European episcopate gathered in the Holy Land and a greeting from the Secretary of State, **Cardinal Pietro Parolin**.

In his message to the European episcopate, **Pope Francis** expressed the hope that "the time spent together" might be above all "an intense time of prayer and solidarity" and that their "rest in the Lord" might "rekindle the freshness of the Gospel", from which "new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression,

more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world (*Evangelii Gaudium, 11*). Finally, the Holy Father entrusted to their prayers "the forthcoming General Synod, so that the Church might respond with ever greater urgency and generosity to the needs of the family".

The meeting then continued behind closed doors with a welcome from **Cardinal Marc Ouellet**, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, who said that "to hold this annual Assembly in the Holy Land is not a choice just like any other. We have come on pilgrimage so that we can say with the Psalmist: *We were all born here* (Psalm 87): each Christian is born here!". The Canadian Cardinal, touching on the issue of the influx of migrants reaching towards the countries of Eastern Europe from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, the presence of Christians in the Holy Land and their contribution as witness in this "microcosm of our globalised world", set the tone for the meeting: "We are all in the same boat! It is not, then, simply a matter of looking at each other, but looking united towards the future, sharing each other's destinies, certain that God continually guides his Church and opens to it new horizons", Cardinal Ouellet concluded.

The afternoon working session then ended with the reading of the greeting of the Secretary of State, **Cardinal Pietro Parolin**, in which he encourages the European episcopate to "continuing the important work aimed at creating in ecclesial communities a heartfelt commitment to enable everyone to experience the living presence of Christ in society by witnessing to the Gospel of life".

some administrative issues, the report on the work of the Council from its General Secretary, **Mgr Duarte da Cunha**, and the celebration of Mass in the church of the *Domus Galilaeae*, presided over by Cardinal Ouellet.

On Saturday 12 September, the meeting is scheduled to receive reports from the individual Bishops' Conferences; to have a special session on the figure of Jesus, entitled "Jesus Christ: yesterday, today and tomorrow", led by **Fr. Jamal Khader**, theologian and Rector of the Patriarchal Seminary at Beit Jala; Mass in Capernaum (the place of Peter's call), and concluding with a meeting with families and a Prayer Vigil for the Family and the forthcoming Synod of Bishops, taking place in October in the Vatican, streamed live from the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth starting at 2015.

Text of the day

- Greetings of H.B. Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (IT)
- Introduction of H.Em. Cardinal Péter Erdő, CCEE President (IT)
- Message of Pope Francis (Ar – IT – EN – FR – DE – SP)
- Greeting of H.Em. Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Prefect of the Congregations for Bishops (IT)
- Homily of H.Em. Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Prefect of the Congregations for Bishops (IT)

Photos available here