General Congregation n. 4

**Testimony – October 09**

**How can we be more fully a sign and instrument**

**of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?**

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Asia is the world's largest continent by land area and population and is diverse in its geography, demography, and political systems. Asia also has diverse cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities. It is the birthplace and cradle of major world religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and others.

Though the systems of beliefs, values, and symbols vary from place to place, the human community's interconnectedness draws the churches and the Asian peoples together. The Asian importance of being relational (with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos), a characteristic of a synodal church, brings with it the unity of the human family and the unity of the peoples of Asia. Except for the Philippines and Timor Leste, Christianity remains a small minority in most parts of Asia. However, the vibrancy and richness of the individual traditions and cultures bring joy and life to the Church.

Among the 4 billion people in Asia, the Catholic Church comprises only 3.31% of the population. Some may see us as small and insignificant, but we consider ourselves as unique and valuable parts of not just the church but also building and transforming human society. In many parts of Asia, the church takes the lead in the service of integral human development and the common good, especially in the fields of education, healthcare, and reaching out to the poor and marginalised groups in society beyond the boundaries of our churches.

While some may consider the church as only a drop in the vast ocean, her ripples are far-reaching. Synodality for Asia is more than the Church existing for herself but for the sake of all. In a pluralistic Asian society, the Church seeks to continue spreading the gospel message despite the challenges. How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of all humanity?

The diversity of religions in Asia makes engaging in various forms of dialogue compelling to build peace, reconciliation, and harmony. We share many experiences of fruitful engagement with other Christians, persons of other religions and traditions, including indigenous spiritualities, and with the society as a whole. In formal and informal settings, dialogue towards peacebuilding, reconciliation, and harmony must permeate every aspect of the church’s life in Asia.

Some expressed reservations about these dialogues for various reasons, including mistrust and suspicion regarding the motives for such dialogues. Nevertheless, for unity in humanity, churches in many parts of Asia play a pivotal role in building bridges for peace, harmony, reconciliation, and even justice and freedom.

In the context that we live in, the Church in Asia cannot be self-referential and, therefore, seeks to engage in renewing the world. Our union with God spurs us to be the light and salt of the earth. One way has been to build Basic Ecclesial Communities, BECs (in some places known as Small Christian Communities or Basic Human Communities). They bring about not only spiritual transformation but also social transformation. They have been the beacons of hope for gospel witnessing in society. The BECs become a leaven of Christian life, care for the poor, and commit to transforming society through a lived gospel experience. These communities demonstrate a *communion that radiates* to Christians and non-Christians alike. They are our visible signs of a synodal church that is relevant and, at the same time, relational.

Dialogue, *ad intra* and *ad extra* remain an integral characteristic of the Church in Asia in a continent as diverse as ours. While bridge-building and reconciliation efforts are ongoing, we also experience increasing religious and social intolerance, leading to persecution, worsening conditions of people's lives, and even threats to human life. Amid opportunities and challenges, these persecuted churches remain faithful to God in new and creative ways. Despite living in a minority and sometimes harsh conditions, the churches of Asia see hope for the future and strive to be authentic expressions of communion, participation, and mission – for a synodal church. Thank you.