

Welcome to Portugal and to Lisbon – one of the courtyards of World History and Civilization.

We really wish to welcome you here, at this crossroads of arrivals and departures: from where we set out to discover the New World and New Peoples; where we returned to with the wide gaze made of sea and encounters; where we received and welcomed the diversity of cultures and peoples that visited us, both those who have passed here and those who have stayed.

And we are very pleased to welcome you as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights in 1948: one of the most meaningful facts of the XXth century, in terms of cultural, political and juridical importance, an answer to a century of violations of the dignity of the human person and its inalienable rights; a milestone in the consciousness of the world relating to an essential core of fundamental human rights which still challenges us today, in a continuous and complex reality demanding the right answers as citizens from the same polis and as Christians.

In fact, the actual complexity of the problems and of the many crises we face today - anthropological, ecological, demographic, social, cultural, economical, political and family crises - with their natural consequences in terms of suffering, loneliness, disorder, conflict, destruction and poverty, affect the dignity and the survival of men and women of the same human family.

This reality cries out for **Law** in the city – that it may fight the barbaric mentality attacking Mankind's consciousness and recognize the dignity of each member of the human family and the equality of its inalienable rights as fundamental bases for the construction of freedom, justice and Peace in the world.

This reality also cries for the **Salvation** offered through faith in the Person of Jesus Christ. A salvation incarnated in the present time and in all places of human reality:

- That may respond in its body to the tendency of dilution, fragmentation, and of spiritual or materialistic reduction of the historical human being;
- That may live in present time, even if the «solid» world (ordered according to the absolute in a stable and true form), is becoming «liquid» (in reference to the relative, the provisional, the momentary);
- That may assume and arrive at every human situation marked by tensions between the local and the global, in a world where mentalities, experiences and its many repercussions extend from North to South, from East to West.

In this context, what kind of work can lay Christians offer for Christ, with Christ and in Christ? Which paths have been, are or can be widely opened for this action in the world and through history, so that it may reach all times and all places?

It is in the form of challenge that we try to answer to these questions by referring to one only experience of the Associated Apostolate of Lay Christians in Portugal (due to the impossibility of making a short presentation of the Portuguese Church, given its extension, depth, diversity of vocations, spiritualities, aggregations and works).

Revisiting the historical path taken by the apostolate of Christian men and women of common life in Portugal when answering to the challenges of each time, we can see that, similarly to the rest of the world where Christianity arrived, they have associated:

- Traditionally – in confraternities, brotherhoods and third orders;

- Since the XIXth and XXth centuries also in associations of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities, characterized by different charismas and gifts, at the service of different demands in a secularized world;
- In the advent of this XXIst century, and during its course, in new apostolic dynamisms, that exceed the typical expressions of individual and associated apostolate, and that have congregated in a network of different lay Christians (stemming from the regular individual and territorial structure of the church or from different associations) both in the Catholic field and in the ecumenical or civil field, by defending fundamental rights, inherited and preserved in the synthesis of Christian humanism, namely as far as the protection of human life is concerned, as well as social development and the welcoming of displaced people and refugees.

Challenged by the urgent needs in the world, by the proposals of **communion for the mission** (from the Second Vatican Council, from the teachings of the pope John Paul II, pope Benedict XVI, pope Francis and diocesan Bishops, as well as from the Portuguese Episcopal Conference), and after trying to search ways of fraternal meeting since 1979 (among different faithful associations and these with the Hierarchy of the Church) it was created in 2011 the National Conference of Associations of Lay Apostolate, that integrated the majority of faithful associations, ecclesial movements and new communities approved by the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, as a platform that intends:

- To provide a means of growth in esteem, cooperation and mutual respect among associations and among the lay Catholics who belong to them and also among these and the Hierarchy and other ecclesial realities, promoting unity in the diversity of the Body of Christ;
- To cultivate an attitude of common discernment of the needs of the actual temporal realities and of the challenges to its evangelization, through the knowledge, reflection and evaluation of the signs of the times;
- To agree on means and actions in order to create a greater unity of spirit and action in the service of the lay people in the world, namely developing coordinated or common actions, according to criteria of need and urgency, in favor of humanity and of the Portuguese society.

Common discernment among all these associations has led, since 2011, to collaboration and action, namely:

- Through common agreement concerning means for a common answer in urgent missions (that have been focused above all in matters related to the protection of life and to support to displaced people and refugees);
- Holding national congresses, motivated by the needs of the world and the present interpellations of the Church, aiming at: placing the Christian faith at the service of culture, in the vast field of civil society; stimulating communitarian and missionary dynamisms in all cities of the country; promoting common answers to the demands of present time (*The Culture of Encounter in the Church and the Contemporary World*, in 2013; *Replacing Man at the Centre of Society, Thought and Life*, in 2015; *Nothing is indifferent to us between Earth and Heaven*, in 2016; *This is the time to hope against all hope, to work for justice and for peace, to love all people, to love them one by one*, in 2018).

In the incarnate and humble life of Christians in the world, lived in a common experience and with a universal gaze, we believe that the way is open for the sanctification of the world from within - knowing, however, that only Fire can fecundate the Earth, like a flash of lightning; thus generating a new humanity, which dedicates the Universe to the Lord.

We close with a film that marked the birth of CNAL.

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