

Saint Gallen, July 6, 2010

“Come and see. The priest: witness and servant of vocations”

Annual Meeting of the European Vocations Service (EVS)
Esztergom, Hungary, July 1-4, 2010

This was the theme of the Annual Congress of the *European Vocations Service* (EVS), which has taken place on July 1-4 at Esztergom (Hungary). The EVS is the Commission of the Council of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), for the care and assistance to the priestly and religious vocations in the Church.

53 delegates from 15 National Churches in Europe (Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Ertzegovina, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Hungary and Scotland) have responded to the convocation. The meeting has also benefitted from the participation of the person responsible for religious pastoral vocations in the U.S., as well as some representatives of Serra International, with all of whom we have lived some days in the sign of fraternity, prayer, analysis of the problems and sharing of experiences connected to the vocations in the Church. On the first day we had also the visit of Mgr. Juliusz Janusz, Apostolic Nuncio in Hungary. We also had the special days of prayer for vocations. During this Congress, we have prayed in the Benedictinian Abbey of Pannohalma for all vocations, in the context of a solemn liturgical celebration in the Cathedral of Esztergom.

After a greeting from H. Ex. Mgr. Wojciech Polak, President of EVS, and H. Em. Card. Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and President of CCEE, Fr. Jorge Madureira, coordinator of EVS, has opened our works by thanking H. Ex. Mgr. Bosák Nándor, Bishop delegate of the pastoral care of vocations in Hungary, and his staff, for their welcome and for organizing the Congress.

The Congress got to the heart of the matter with the conference given by H. Ex. Mgr. János Székely, auxiliary Bishop of Esztergom-Budapest (biblist), who has focused on the witness given by the prophets in Israel and emphasised that the prophetic movement is not a feature only of the biblical world. What distinguishes the prophetism of the Bible from the prophetism of the Ancient Eastern World is the fact that, unlike the pagan prophets, the prophets of the Bible express their vocation by emphasising that their mission draws its inspiration from a personal encounter with the living God, who calls man to be his friend even before being sent, thus emphasising that the person is more important than the message and the mission which have been entrusted to him.

The second conference was given by H. Ex. Mgr. Jean-Louis Bruguès, Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, who has emphasised that the personal encounter with God is the very source of every vocation, and especially of the priestly vocation. The priest is called to preside and lead the community of the baptized “in persona Christi”, the Good Shepherd. Called in force of the baptism to be a presence of Christ in the world, by means of his sacred ordination, the priest has the ministry to guide his brothers as a servant to all vocations, especially through his witness involving his family of origin, the Christian community and the priestly community, which is called to be a witness of brotherhood. The priestly vocation is not only a personal vocation, it is the vocation of the

whole Christian community. The witness of the priest can only be the fruit of a ministry with a clear identity and requires a sound preparation across his whole life.

The evening has been consecrated to a presentation by Ferenc Janka, vice-secretary general of CCEE, of the role of CCEE, and by the individual delegates, on the work carried out by their respective National Offices in favour of the pastoral care of vocations.

The third session has been consecrated to a conference given by Mario Oscar Llanos SDB, Professor at the Pontifical Salesian University of Rome, who has introduced the role of the priest in the pastoral care of vocations in the light of the investigation on the pastoral care of priestly vocations which had been promoted by the Pontifical Work of Vocations and had involved all the National Offices in 2008-2009. The data being collected have shown: a need for giving more attention to all vocations, as indicated in *Pastores dabo vobis* at nr. 31; the need for a greater commitment and a better preparation in accompanying the discernment of those who respond to their own call. Every vocation is a fruit of an in-vocation. The witness of the priest, his life of communion, his daily efforts in listening generate the truth and make possible a free choice.

H. Ex. Mgr. Bosák Nándor, Bishop delegate of the pastoral care of vocations in Hungary, has outlined a summarised history of the pastoral care of vocations in the Hungarian Church through the statistical data of the last 20 years.

On Saturday morning, H. Ex. Mgr. Juan Maria Uriarte, Bishop emeritus of San Sebastian (Spain), has offered a pedagogical reflection on the very urgent need for promoting priestly vocations. After having emphasised some resistance in the priests in proposing the vocation to the ordained ministry, such as the use of rigid schemes in vocational criteria, which instead are always changing, or the fear of scaring the candidates by proposing them an unusual life, or the fear of disrupting the life of those young men at an early stage. All this warns not to confuse the proposal with our own projections and expectations and emphasises the difference between invitation and call. The witness given by fraternal life and the proclamation of Christ by means of actions and words foster a flowering of vocations. The afternoon has been consecrated to the work in groups, in which the topic of the Congress has been deepened by sharing reflections and underlining new approaches and suggestions to develop the pastoral care of vocations.

The day has been characterized also by the presentation of three significant experiences, which have been proposed by the National Offices of Hungary, France and Italy. The first has presented some catechetical experiences lived with the young faithful of a parish community. The second has presented a campaign of media communication on the vocation and the life of priests. The third has illustrated the results of an analysis, fruit of several studies and investigations on the condition of life of our priests, their efforts and expectations in contemporary society.

The main papers of the Meeting can be found on the Web page of EVS: www.vocations.eu

The works came to an end on Sunday morning with the interventions of Fr. Eusebio Hernandez, representative of the Congregation for Consecrated Life; Fr. Francis Bonnici, representative of the Congregation for Catholic Education; Fr. Manuel Barbosa, representative of UCESM; Mgr. Wojciech Polak and Fr. Jorge Madureira, who concluded our Congress. The next EVS Meeting will take place on June 30 through July 3, 2011.

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The Council of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) includes, as members, the 33 Catholic Bishops' Conferences which are presently in existence in Europe, represented ex officio by their Presidents, the Archbishops of Luxemburg, the Principality of Monaco, Cyprus of the Maronites and the Bishop of Chişinău (Moldova). It is presided by Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Primate of Hungary; its Vice-presidents are Cardinal Josip Bozanić, Archbishop of Zagreb, and Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux. The Secretary General of CCEE is Fr. Duarte da Cunha. The headoffice of the Secretariat is at St. Gallen (Switzerland)