

**Homily at the Solemn Mass to Celebrate the Inauguration of
the Pontificate of Pope Francis
by John Cardinal Tong, Bishop of Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong**

**On April 8, 2013 Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Distinguished Guests,

I am very grateful to you for your participation in this Eucharist for invoking God's blessings on our new Pope Francis. Regarding his background and his moving words and deeds, the media have reported at great length, and I will not repeat all of that. Tonight, I want to share with you my recent personal contact and conversations with him.

On March 4, eight days before the conclave for the election of a new pope, most of the cardinals had already gathered in Rome and expressed their views on the Church and expectations of the future pope. As I had to preside at the liturgy of the Scrutiny and Anointing for adult catechumens here, who were scheduled to be baptized this past Easter Vigil, I did not arrive in Rome until March 6.

At the meetings with all cardinals, I had reiterated my concerns about the Church in China: The Chinese Catholics have appreciated the care Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI had for them. They have regarded Emeritus Pope Benedict's Letter to the Catholics in China issued in 2007 as a document to guide them. They are aware that out of his concerns the Commission for the Catholic Church in China and a sub-commission on formation for the clergy and laity in China were established. They hope that the new Holy Father will continue to care for them, help them to be reconciled with each other, and that a dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese government will resume, and that eventually the Church in China will achieve full communion with the Universal Church. With the Lord's blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Hong Kong is always happy to serve as a Bridge Church between the Church in China and the Universal Church.

On March 13, at about 7 pm, in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, the cardinals had finished the fifth ballot. The Holy Spirit had listened to our fervent prayers and of the faithful worldwide. A new pope, the Successor of Peter, was among

us. He was Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and took the name Francis. In his white robe, he first went to embrace Cardinal Ivan Dias who had difficulty in walking. The new Holy Father really cares for everybody, particularly the weak. Then, he accepted the congratulations and loud applause of the cardinals. One by one, we extended our personal greetings and embraces of love to him.

In my turn, I presented Pope Francis a small bronze Chinese statue of Our Lady of Sheshan, and said in Italian, “The Catholics in China love you and will pray for you. Also, we ask for your care for all Chinese Catholics, and please pray for us (Noi Cattolici Cinesi L'amiamo e preghiamo per Lei. Le chiediamo di amare e pregare per noi).” Pope Francis smiled and said, “Chinese Catholics have given many testimonies to the Universal Church.” To my surprise, he kissed my right hand to show his love and devotion for the Church in China. This gesture moved me deeply.

On the next day, at 5 pm, in the Sistine Chapel again with all cardinals, Pope Francis celebrated his first Mass as the Successor of Peter. In his homily, he shared with us his reflections about the Church. He highlighted three actions that the Church must take: Journeying with the Lord under the light, actively building up the Church, proclaiming the Gospel and professing our faith. All these focus on the Crucified Lord Jesus Christ. His homily helped my reflections a great deal during the Holy Week.

On March 15 early morning, when I was on my way to the chapel in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, where all the cardinals stayed during the conclave, Pope Francis and I happened to take the same elevator. He said that the Marian statue, now standing in his own room, reminded him of the Jesuit Saint Francis Xavier who arrived in China more than 460 years ago. He told me he never forgets to pray for Chinese Catholics. During the Mass, Pope Francis further pointed out in his homily that St. Ignatius of Loyola taught us not to forget the Suffering Jesus whenever we encounter difficulties in life; in this way, God will help us to enter into the mystery of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. Towards the end of his homily, unexpectedly, Pope Francis openly thanked me for the statue of Mary. Later that day, when the Holy Father greeted all the cardinals, one by one, in the Sala Clementina of the Apostolic Palace, I thanked him for remembering the Catholics in China.

On March 20, a day after the papal installation, I bade farewell to Pope Francis before departing for Hong Kong, and said, “On behalf of the Church in China,

may I congratulate you again and thank you for your care and prayers for the Church in China.” There, he kissed my hand again to show his devotion to the Church in China, and said in Italian, “La Chiesa in Cina è nel mio cuore.” It means “The Church in China is in my heart”.

Pope Francis’ words and deeds are really appealing, but what touch me the most are his speeches and actions that reflect the Gospel values and bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ. For that, we are grateful for Divine Providence that led us to elect a beloved and humble supreme leader of the Catholic Church.

Besides, he has a special devotion to the Blessed Mother Mary. Right after his election, he prayed inside the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, for the protection of the Church and the people in the world. In his homilies, Pope Francis often referred to Our Lady when he shared his contemplation of Jesus’ ministry, believing Mary was at the scene when Jesus preached. United with Our Lady, let us pray to the Lord Jesus to bless Pope Francis and enable him to fulfill the ministry of the Successor of Peter, the Shepherd of the Church.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and dear friends, I would like to end this sharing by quoting Pope Francis’ homily delivered at his Inauguration Mass where he called us to be the protectors of Creation. He says:

“Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment. Let us not allow omens of destruction and death to accompany the advance of this world! But to be ‘protectors’, we also have to keep watch over ourselves! Let us not forget that hatred, envy and pride defile our lives! Being protectors, then, also means keeping watch over our emotions, over our hearts, because they are the seat of good and evil intentions: intentions that build up and tear down! We must not be afraid of goodness or even tenderness!”

(Homily at Inauguration Mass, Pope Francis, March 19, 2013)

May God bless you!