

Evangelization Congregation's Letter to China ***"Praise the Lord for Your Efforts ... for Unity Within the Church"***

Cardinal Ivan Dias

VATICAN CITY, JULY 29, 2010 (Zenit.org) — Here is the letter Cardinal Ivan Dias, prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, sent July 5 to the bishops and priests of mainland China. FIDES news agency published the letter today.

**Dearest Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood of
Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest,**

Peace be with you!

Inspired by celebrations during the Year for Priests, recently concluded, I send to you cordial and brotherly greetings and a word of encouragement for your arduous pastoral duties as shepherds of the flock entrusted to you by the Lord in your noble nation. I long to say these things to you personally, to hear about your joys and your woes, about the hopes you nurture and the challenges you face every day. Your testimony and your messages received here at the Missionary Congregation fill us with consolation and spur us to pray fervently that the Lord may render you ever stronger in the faith and sustain your activity to propagate the Good News of Jesus Christ in your beloved country.

With our thoughts still set on the famous figure of Saint Jean Marie Vianney, Cure d'Ars, so often recalled during the Year for Priests, we acknowledge first of all — with deep humility — that we are called by Jesus to be “not servants, but friends” (cfr John 15:15) not through our own merits, but through His infinite mercy. He has conferred upon us the lofty dignity of being Alter Christus and ministers of his Word, his Body and Blood and his Forgiveness. May we always remember His words: “You did not choose me, no,

I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last” (John 15:16).

Precisely because the priest is *Alter Christus* — indeed, *Ipse Christus* — he must be a Man of God and a Man for others.

Firstly, a Man of God: that is, a man who leads men and women to God and carries God to men and women. Therefore he must distinguish himself as a man of prayer and an austere style of life, profoundly in love with Christ and, like John the Baptist, proud to proclaim His presence amongst us, especially in the Most Holy Eucharist.

Secondly a priest must be a Man for others: a man entirely dedicated to the faithful, youth and adults, entrusted to his pastoral care and to all those with whom the Lord Jesus chose to identify himself or those towards whom He showed special kindness: sinners first of all, the poor, the sick and the excluded, widows, children, but also sheep who do not yet belong to His fold (cfr John 10:16). An ecclesiastic will therefore resist any temptation to enrich himself with material goods or seek favors for his family or ethnic group, or nurture unwholesome ambitions of making a career for himself in society or in politics. These things are entirely foreign to the priestly vocation and would be a serious distraction from his mission to lead the faithful like the good shepherd on the path of holiness, justice and peace.

Allow me, my dearest Confreres, to dwell on the important role of a bishop or priest as an operator of unity within the Church. This task has a twofold dimension and entails communion with the Pope, the “rock” upon which Jesus chose to build his Church, and secondly union with all the members of the Church.

Firstly: communion with the Holy Father. We are all too aware of how some of you suffered in the recent past because of loyalty to the Holy See. We pay homage to each and all, certain that, as Pope Benedict XVI affirms, “Communion with Peter and with his Successors is in fact a guarantee of freedom for the Church’s Pastors and for the Communities entrusted to them... the Petrine ministry is a guarantee of freedom in the sense of full adherence to

the truth, to the authentic tradition, so that the People of God may be preserved from errors concerning faith and morals” (Homily during Mass on the solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29, 2010). The exemplary and courageous loyalty towards the See of Peter demonstrated by Catholics in China, is a precious gift of the Lord.

The other dimension of unity among Christians is union among individual members of the ecclesial community. This important challenge you are already tackling, as you seek to strengthen unity within the Church herself. It would be helpful to enter, in spirit, the Upper Room where, after celebrating the Last Supper with his Apostles and ordaining them priests of the New and Eternal Covenant, the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father with these words “May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me” (John 17:21). Three times Jesus insists on the unity of his followers as a sign of credibility that he has been sent by the Father into the world. My dearest confreres, let us heed this eloquent call for the unity of Christians coming from the Heart of the One who loved them, called them and sent them to work in His Vineyard.

In the above mentioned homily the Holy Father affirms: “Indeed if we think of the two millenniums of the Church’s history, we may note as the Lord Jesus had foretold (cf. Matthew 10:16-33) that trials for Christians have never been lacking and in certain periods and places have assumed the character of true and proper persecution. Yet, despite the suffering they cause, they do not constitute the gravest danger for the Church. Indeed she is subjected to the greatest danger by what pollutes the faith and Christian life of her members and communities, corroding the integrity of the Mystical Body, weakening her capacity for prophecy and witness, and marring the beauty of her face.”

The Pope goes on to indicate the instigator of this evil situation and says: “One of the typical effects of the action of the Evil One is, precisely, the internal division of the ecclesial Community. Ruptures are in fact symptoms of the power of sin that continues to act in members of the Church even after the redemption. However,

Christ's word is clear: 'Non praevalent — they shall not prevail' (Matthew 16:18). The unity of the Church is rooted in her union with Christ and the cause of full Christian unity that must ever be sought and renewed, from generation to generation is also sustained by his prayer and his promise."

Let us praise the Lord for your efforts, accomplished and ongoing, for unity within the Church, in faithful response to the indications given by the Holy Father in the Letter he addressed to you on May 27, 2007, and for the results already obtained. May God bless your initiatives so that unity of ministers among themselves and between them and their flock may be ever stronger in Christ and in his Church "ad maiorem Dei gloriam".

On this happy circumstance, I have the honor of assuring you of the closeness of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI; with paternal affection he blesses you and all those entrusted to your pastoral care and urges you to continue without fear on the path of holiness, unity and communion, as did the generations which have gone before you.

May Most Holy Mary, Help of Christians, venerated with tender, filial devotion by the Church in China at Sheshan, protect you and intercede that your resolutions to spread the sweet fragrance of the Gospel of her Son Jesus to every corner of your beloved homeland may bear fruit. In this important and demanding task may you be assisted by the luminous example of the unforgettable missionary to China, Father Matteo Ricci S.J., of whom we recall with gratitude and affection the 400th anniversary of his departure for the Kingdom of the "Lord of Heaven".

Once again I assure you of our prayers,

With brotherly greetings In Corde Mariae,

From the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, July 5, 2010.

Cardinal Ivan Dias
Prefect

+ Robert Sarah
Secretary