

Editorial

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you," (Jn. 20:21) was the theme of the Tenth World Youth Day, held in Manila from January 10 to 15, 1995. An exhortation of Pope John Paul II, "Be Not Afraid!" and the title of the theme song, "Tell the World of His Love," were also prominently displayed on the billboards, banners, T-shirts and souvenir buttons seen in the Philippine capital that week. What do these three imperatives mean to the Chinese Catholics from various places who took part in the pilgrimage?

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you," is a sentence from the Gospel that presupposes faith. Only those who believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead will believe that He spoke these words to His fearful disciples in the locked upper room on the evening of Easter Sunday. "Faith" was the theme of the catechetical session on Wednesday, January 11. The gymnasium of Pius XII Academy had been reserved for the delegates from various parts of China: 375 from Hong Kong, over 100 from Macau, 24 from the Mainland, and over 100 from Taiwan, using Mandarin as the common language. But the Mainlanders were nowhere to be seen on Wednesday. On Tuesday afternoon, at the opening ceremonies in Rizal Park, they had seen a flag from Taiwan among the flags near the grandstand, and so they walked out. Various phone calls and meetings presumably followed. Faith is an idealistic concept, not a materialistic one, but someone quoted Pope John Paul II that "the future belongs to those with ideals." Young Chinese Catholics - the future of their respective churches - listened to an address on the day's theme, then had a chance to share their ideals in mixed groups before Mass.

"Be not afraid!" is a message of hope, the theme for Thursday, January 12. The Mainlanders came, and fears that their visit to Manila (the first time a Chinese delegation has attended a papal activity) would be ruined by the incident of the flag proved groundless. Everyone was in good spirits, partly due to contagious Philippine hospitality. While there were reports of terrorists with bombs lurking in the vicinity, we trusted in the police and in God. Most of us watched the Pope's arrival on

TV, but some were chosen to go to the airport to welcome him. While this took up most of their day, and they did not see him up close, they were glad they could be present in person.

"Tell the World of His Love" was such a rousing theme song that Friday's lecture was almost superfluous. After time to pray in historic churches, seeing a religious procession in the carnival atmosphere of a barrio festival, and joining in the singing and clapping at an international youth festival, most of us were on a religious high. Then the Stations of the Cross on Friday afternoon brought us down to earth again. Many delegates found it the most meaningful and thought-provoking part of the week, a reflection on the cost of love.

On Saturday the Pope spoke to "all Chinese Catholics" over Radio Veritas. He said he is aware of the difficulties that they face, urged them not to be afraid, to love one another (a hint at the need for Christian charity within the divided church in China), but added: "genuine love however cannot be separated from truth." There is a need for "all parts of the Church" to be in "effective communion" with "Peter, the Rock." It has been the clear Roman teaching for over a millennium that the Pope has juridical as well as spiritual authority in the church, but Beijing sees this as interference in its internal affairs. Rather than mention this explicitly, what the Pope did was to "earnestly invite you all to seek paths to communion and reconciliation," and entrusted his listeners "to the maternal protection of Mary, Queen of China."

Rizal Park was already packed when the Pope arrived at 6 PM Saturday to begin the vigil, and the crowds increased after midnight, then multiplied at dawn. Overcrowding unexpectedly became everyone's prime concern. People flowed into the streets, blocking the Popemobile, so the Pope had to arrive by helicopter. The miracle of Manila was that no one was trampled to death in the largest crowd in human history, four million or more people.

When the Papal Mass finally began at 10 AM on Sunday, January 15, the universal, Catholic, nature of the church was evident. Seeing colorfully dressed delegates from every race and nation made many of the Chinese realize with pride for the first time what they had always know intellectually: that we are a universal church, not a Western import.

According to Thomas Aquinas, the first effect of the

Eucharist is the unity of the body of Christ. Only one or two percent of those present were close enough to the altar to receive Holy Communion, but even those three kilometers away listened to the radio, prayed the Our Father together, exchanged an embrace of peace, gave food and drink to those who had fainted due to the crush of humanity and the noonday heat, and held Rosaries and medals high for the Pope (on the horizon, in that direction) to bless with his final blessing.

On Monday, the newspapers of Manila were asking if the Pope's visit would make any difference in the long run. After the party was over, and the emotions ebbed, would not life just go on as always? Applying these questions to the Catholic Church of greater China, all the problems of evangelization and inculturation, plus the limits of personnel and funding, remain unchanged. The sensitivity towards the Taiwan flag makes it clear that the question of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Taipei still rubs salt into wounds and the various questions regarding the concelebration of the Chinese delegation with the Holy Father is a vivid reminder that the Church on the mainland is a divided Church and that certain obstacles to full unity remain.

Yet young people from all over the world, including Mainland China, benefited from attending this celebration of the Universal Church recommitting itself to evangelization. [MJS]

