

Card. Stanisław Ryłko
President
Pontifical Council for the Laity
Vatican City

UNUM OMNES - International Council of Catholic Men
General Assembly
Rome, 17 September 2012

Mass

Greeting and introduction

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, I cordially greet all of you, dear friends, members of *Unum Omnes*, the International Council of Catholic Men. You have come to Rome from other parts of the world for your General Assembly. I thank your president, Mr Niall M. Kennedy, for inviting me to preside at this eucharistic celebration that concludes the first day of your Assembly.

Saint Paul reminds us – in the first reading that we shall hear shortly – that every eucharistic celebration transports us spiritually to the cenacle in Jerusalem. It is here that Jesus, before his passion of redemption had begun, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. The Second Vatican Council tells us that the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life – and therefore of the life of each one of us. It helps our faith to grow and encourages our missionary activity in the world.

Let us therefore prepare ourselves to meet the Lord who comes to us, and with sincere repentance for our sins, let us say together: *I confess to Almighty God...*

Homily:

“Lord, increase our faith!”(Cf Lk 17:5)

1. The International Council of Catholic Men, *Unum Omnes*, is here in Rome at this time for an important event. As in every General Assembly, this is a special time for evaluation of the progress your Council has made in the past few years in serving the mission of the Church. It is an opportunity to give thanks to the Lord for all the good that has been done in the lives of so many Catholic men in many countries of the world because of your efforts. Furthermore, it is a time when your Council must look to the future with confidence and make plans and projects so that you can address the challenges of a post-modern world with renewed courage.

This General Assembly is taking place as we approach a significant time in the life of the Church. We shall soon mark the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the Council that gave rise to “the hour of the laity” in the Church. In October we shall begin the Year of Faith called by Pope Benedict XVI as a response to the serious crisis of faith taking place mostly in the Western world. Also in October there will be the awaited Synod of Bishops on the new evangelisation. All of these events are very important for the vocation and mission of Catholic men in the Church and the world. They surely have a place in your General Assembly.

2. As we have said, your General Assembly is taking place against a background of ecclesial life that is very rich. What is the common denominator of all of these celebrations? I believe that faith is at the centre. Faith is the basis of Christian life. Without faith, everything else falls apart. Pope Benedict XVI continues to remind us that the fundamental question for humankind today is the question of God and God’s place in the lives of human beings. “Everything in our lives changes according to whether God is or is not...”, the Pope tells us. Yet, in the world today, God is often cast aside or even totally excluded from people’s lives. Countries with a long tradition of Christianity are becoming more and more “*ad gentes*” mission territory! The Pope speaks of a “tired Christianity” and of a “strange forgetfulness of God”. There is even an “eclipse of the sense of God” among a great number of our contemporaries. The erosion of faith from the lives of the baptised has reached proportions that are of great concern today. The Pope invites us all to think about our faith and to revive it in a new way in fidelity to the magisterium of the Church and Tradition. This is

the big challenge presented to each one of us by the Church during the Year of Faith. We must try to rediscover the wonder of the gift of faith that we have received from God in baptism. It is a great evangelical treasure, and we should be ready to put everything we have into achieving it.

Faith is not an issue that can be solved once and for all. It is an ongoing challenge in our lives. We must take care of our faith with a deep sense of responsibility. Faith is like a living plant that will die if it is not cared for and nourished... To nurture our faith is to know its essential contents... It is frightening to see how many Christians today are ignorant of their faith!... Therefore, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* should be a companion on the journey of life of each one of us...

Let us not forget that faith in Jesus Christ is a treasure to be shared with others. The Church is missionary by nature! To be a Christian means to be a missionary of Jesus Christ in the world! Blessed John Paul II told us that “Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!”. That is the only way! (Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n.2). You, Catholic men, have an urgent task. You must be active in the new evangelisation. We Christians must go out from the confines of our parishes and into society, for people are awaiting the proclamation of the Gospel... Unfortunately, many Catholic men today abandon this task. Their presence is missing. Society needs their witness of faith as Catholic men who are husbands, fathers, workers and professionals... Sociologists speak of modern society as being a “society without fathers”, without father figures! This is a dangerous situation, especially for the education and transmission of the faith to future generations... There is a need for Catholic men – in parish communities as well as in their families, in the workplace and in public life – to feel fully responsible and to give Christian witness!... They must not give in to the pressure of our society that wants to confine faith to the private sphere. Radical secularism aims to eliminate all manifestations of faith – especially by Christians – from public life. We must give an adequate response and “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have” as Saint Peter tells us (Cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

3. In the Gospel reading that we have just heard, Christ invites us to consider an example of faith that is really beautiful: the faith of the Roman centurion who asks Jesus to cure his servant who is seriously ill. Although he was a pagan, he asked, and he firmly believed that Jesus had the power to do what he asked. We know his words well! The centurion said humbly: “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof [...] but say the word, and my servant will be healed.” Jesus

replied “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel” (Cf. Lk 7:1-10).

We are encouraged by this touching example of the centurion’s faith, and we ask the Lord during this Eucharist: “Lord, increase our faith!...” (Lk 17:5). Make us truly people of faith... Cardinal Ratzinger once said: “What we most need at this time in history are people whose lives of shining faith will make God credible in this world. The negative witness of Christians who spoke of God but lived in opposition to God, have darkened the image of God and have opened the way to unbelief. We need people who gaze directly at God in order to learn true humanity [...] It is only through people who have been touched by God that God can return to be among humankind”.(Subiaco, 1 April 2005). Let us, therefore, allow ourselves to be touched by God... Let us allow the Lord to enter our lives and to make us authentic and courageous witnesses of his Gospel...