

© The Catholic News & Herald, Oct. 10, 2008

**Proclaiming Christ's word
Congress speakers inform and inspire**

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CHARLOTTE — A diverse group of speakers presented, challenged and enlightened their audiences with a variety of topics at the Diocese of Charlotte's fourth annual Eucharistic Congress in Charlotte Oct. 3-4.

Covering everything from architecture to bioethics, this year's speakers educated and inspired with presentations on their areas of expertise in both English and Spanish.

The congress' keynote speaker was Cardinal John P. Foley, grand master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem.

In his talk Friday evening, Oct. 3, Cardinal Foley reflected on eucharistic congresses in general and especially focused on the 1976 International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia.

"I want people to get a sense of the implications of the Eucharist," said Cardinal Foley in an interview with The Catholic News & Herald.

Eucharistic congresses are important because they "give us an opportunity to celebrate our faith together and give witness of our belief to others," he said.

In keeping with the theme of this year's Eucharistic Congress, "It Is Christ Whom We Proclaim," Cardinal Foley encouraged the audience to imitate St. Paul by sharing faith with gratitude, with pride and with love.

"As Catholics I think we are sometimes too shy about sharing our faith with others," said Cardinal Foley.

"Faith is the only thing that increases as we give it away," he said. "Why don't we attempt to share that with others?"

The homilist during the eucharistic holy hour and Benediction on Saturday morning, Oct. 4, was retired Archbishop John F. Donoghue, second bishop of Charlotte.

Archbishop Donoghue talked about the human reality of hunger and "the need for substance that amasses from the depth of our being."

"The food that nourishes our soul is Jesus Christ," said Archbishop Donoghue. "We are here to do this in his memory and bring to the Lord every good thing that we are as people and as church."

The archbishop spoke about the diversity of our church as represented by the attendees at this year's Eucharistic Congress.

"Our roles, talents and our gifts are as countless as the stars in the sky," said Archbishop Donoghue.

"Throughout this day we are here to share our gifts and to help one another," he said. "Culture, language, age difference and prayer style will not divide us, but instead draw us together, giving us a better sense of who we are and how Christ lives in each of us."

The first speaker for the general session was Father Richard Ho Lung, founder of the Missionaries of the Poor, an international monastic order of brothers dedicated to service of the poor.

The title of Father Ho Lung's talk was "Servant of the Poor" and focused on the Eucharist and the transformation of human love into divine love.

"The Lord is calling us to love the poor, the stranger, the prisoner, the discarded and the forgotten," said Father Ho Lung, "to love our enemy and do good to those who hate us. It is a type of living and loving which transforms the world."

Father Ho Lung's presentation featured a musical performance by six members of the group "Father Ho Lung and Friends," made up of Jamaican artists performing songs written by Father Ho Lung.

When asked about the importance of music in his ministry, Father Ho Lung said, "It is a natural expression of who I am and the joys in my heart."

The next speaker for the general track was Tarek Saab, who appeared as a contestant on NBC TV's "The Apprentice."

During his delivery, entitled "Faith Gut Check," Saab stressed the importance of living with the afterlife in mind.

"There is a spiritual warfare ablaze in our society," said Saab. "Losing one's life is nothing compared to losing one's soul."

Saab shared a similar message when he talked to the high school-age audience.

"We are a country of addicts," he said. "We're addicted to so many things that we seemingly can't live without. They take time away from our faith and distort our view of society."

In terms of what he wanted audience members to take away from his talk, Saab said, "My greatest hope is that people will shift their priorities."

“Power isn’t having the world at your fingertips,” he said. “Power is having the world at your fingertips and being able to give it up.”

Following Saab was a presentation by architectural historian Denis McNamara, assistant director and faculty member of the Liturgical Institute at the University of St. Mary of the Lake and Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Ill.

In his lecture, “Proclaiming Christ in Sacred Art and Architecture,” McNamara said he wanted people to “come away with an understanding that church architecture and theology work hand in hand.”

“On earth we try to use material of earth to reveal what heaven is like,” said McNamara. “We’re getting ready for heaven by experiencing the glory of heaven now.”

For McNamara, the study of sacred architecture has “been the vehicle that God has chosen for me to find my path to salvation.”

But you don’t have to be an architectural historian to reap the spiritual benefits of sacred art and architecture.

McNamara suggests reading the Book of Revelation, particularly chapters four and 20, for inspiration.

“In Revelation, St. John is taken on a tour of heaven by an angel. If you make your church look like that, and your liturgy sound like that,” McNamara said, “then you have a very good start.”

Dominican Sister Terese Auer was the final speaker for the general session.

Sister Auer is the chair of the bioethics department at Pope John Paul the Great Catholic High School in Dumfries, Va.

In her address, “Proclaiming Christ through Our Reverence for the Human Person,” Sister Auer spoke about the dignity of the human person and how that is related to being in the image of God.

“Bioethics is the study of how we can use the life sciences and medicine in an ethical way,” Sister Auer told the audience.

“The criterion for any ethical issue is to focus on the human person,” she said.

She stressed the importance of this curriculum being incorporated into the science departments in our schools because she said “we want young people to be able to handle the bioethical issues of our time.”

“In a society where science reigns supreme, we need an ethical balance so that science serves the person” as opposed to dominating the person, she said.

In terms of how bioethics ties into the moral responsibility of Catholics in today’s world, Sister Auer said, “It is a hand and glove fit.”

Speakers for the Hispanic track included Roberto Ramirez, a member of the Community of the Servants of Christ, who offered testimony of his conversion experience that called him to make radical changes in his life; Lupita Venegas, a family therapist and international speaker on human development; and Sister Bertha Lopez Chavez, a pro-life coordinator in Mexico, founding member of The City of Joy Foundation in Mexico and a director of PAIPID, a Catholic rehabilitation center providing care and counseling for people with HIV and AIDS and their families.

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