

Amid darkness, Encuentro is 'light' that shows way forward



Amid so much bad news in the Church, the recent V Encuentro celebration in Grapevine, Texas, stands out as a much-needed event of celebration and hope.

The culmination of a years-long process of evangelization within the Hispanic community and developing Hispanic leaders within the U.S. Church, the gathering brought together approximately 3,200 delegates and bishops for a long weekend of prayer, discussion and celebration. Joseph White, OSV's national catechetical consultant, writes about it for this week's issue. In the story, he quotes Bishop Michael Sis of San Angelo, Texas, who acknowledges that the gathering was a welcome break from the constantly developing clergy sexual abuse crisis.

"These days, our Church is passing through very difficult times," Bishop Sis said. "Gathering at the V Encuentro is like an oasis of joy for us, to step away from the routine of our work and to celebrate the gifts of Hispanic Catholics from all around the country. We have much to celebrate, and we also have much to do."

In his opening remarks, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, addressed the crisis directly.

"My friends, we know that this is also a time of pain in our mother Church," Cardinal DiNardo said. "The revelations of

misconduct by a few bishops and priests, the release of the Pennsylvania grand jury report, and other continuing revelations cause great shame and sorrow. As bishops, we have fallen short of what God expects of his shepherds. For this, we again ask forgiveness from both the Lord and those who have been harmed, and from you, the People of God.”

But amid the darkness, he said, “the Encuentro is a light that shines and illuminates the way forward. The enthusiasm, the passion, the love, and the joy of the Encuentro process is a means of grace, a gift to us as we rebuild the Church.”

In his homily at the closing Mass, Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles reiterated the power of the individuals present at the gathering to help lead the Church out of darkness and into the light, calling them the “spiritual heirs of St. Juan Diego,” who assisted Our Lady of Guadalupe in evangelizing the indigenous of Mexico.

“Think about that, my brothers and sisters: Jesus entrusted the mission of his Church in the New World to a lay person,” Archbishop Gomez said. “Not to a priest or a bishop. Not to the member of a religious order. ... My brothers and sisters, I believe that this moment in the Church – is the hour of the laity. It is the time for saints. (The Lord) is calling the lay faithful to work together with the bishops to renew and rebuild his Church.”

Though spoken at the Encuentro gathering, these words should resonate with each of us as an important reminder of the role we can play in healing and renewing our hurting Church.

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