

To the cross and the empty tomb



ARCHBISHOP JOSÉ H. GOMEZ

Archbishop's Message

I've had an intense but amazing week. Our archdiocesan Religious Education Congress was a big success.

I celebrated two Masses for a total of 16,000 young people. I took part in an online "chat" with young Catholics. I saw many old friends and met many new friends from all across the country. I prayed and learned a lot and I came away inspired.

For me, this Congress shows the vitality of the Church in our country. There was such passion and energy! I'm grateful to know so many men and women, young and old, from every nationality — all dedicated to Jesus Christ and the mission of his Catholic Church.

I wonder if we fully appreciate just how important the Catholic Church is in our world today.

The Church's mission is not sectarian. It's not about promoting Catholicism or even about making more and better Catholics.

Our mission is to save souls and to lift up the hearts of our neighbors to see that their lives have a transcendent meaning. Our mission is to inspire our brothers and sisters to build a world that is worthy of the great dignity of being a human person created in the image of God.

That's why the Church is so important. Because the Church is the last institution in our society that claims to know "ultimate" truths — what is the meaning of life; where we come from and where we're heading; why we're here and how we ought to live.

If we think about it, other institutions in our society ignore these questions or assume they can't be answered. Media, government, even education — all seem to suggest that there are no truths, just many equally valid opinions about what is true and what is

the right way to live.

But people are born with a desire to know the mystery of their lives. And the answers of mere pluralism and relativism will never satisfy them.

We have a great responsibility because in the Church we know

the truth is real. And we know the truth has a name. We know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We know that only he can save us and set us free; only he can show us what our lives are really all about.

The Church's mission is ever ancient and ever new. Our mission of the new evangelization is part of the great story of salvation that stretches back to the cross and the empty tomb.

So it's fitting that after this experience of the Congress, this Sunday we begin Holy Week. This week we enter into the "hour" of Jesus — the hour in which he is lifted up; the hour of his saving passion, death and resurrection.

The good news of salvation can only be proclaimed by those who have truly experienced it. So in this Holy Week we need to pray for a deeper experience of the liberation that comes to us by the power of his cross and resurrection.

Let's try this week to really walk with Jesus. To really go up to Jerusalem with him to celebrate the Passover. Let's try to stay close to him as he makes himself the paschal Lamb who is sacrificed — offering his Body and Blood on the cross and in the gifts of bread and wine.

As I write these lines, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI is in the middle of his week-long pilgrimage of hope to Mexico and Cuba. And I am struck again by the Holy Father's vision of the Church and our personal responsibility to bring our society to a new encounter with God.

Here is something he said in Cuba:

The Church, the living body of Christ, has

the mission of prolonging on earth the salvific presence of God, of opening the world to something greater than itself, to the love and the light of God.

It is worth the effort, dear brothers and sisters, to devote your entire life to Christ, to grow in his friendship each day and to feel called to proclaim the beauty and the goodness of his life to every person, to all our brothers and sisters.

I encourage you in this task of sowing the word of God in the world and offering to everyone the true nourishment of the body of Christ. Easter is already approaching; let us determine to follow Jesus without fear or doubts on his journey to the Cross.

Let's make this our prayer as we pray for one another at the entrance of this Passion Week. Let's entrust our lives, and those of our brothers and sisters in Mexico and Cuba, to the loving help of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas. **TD**

Follow Archbishop Gomez at: www.facebook.com/ArchbishopGomez.



ESTEBAN FELIX, POOL VIA REUTERS

Pope Benedict XVI kneels in prayer at the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre in Cuba March 27

F.Y.I.

"Keep Kids Safe" During Child Abuse Prevention Month: During April, Catholic school and religious education students throughout the Archdiocese will wear bright blue ribbon-shaped stickers that say "Keep Kids Safe." The Archdiocese's "Keep Kids Safe" campaign coincides with national Child Abuse Prevention Month. Children will be reviewing important child safety lessons this month. Parishes are also being encouraged to include in their liturgies this month specially-prepared petitions that ask God to heal abuse victims and their families. "Keep Kids Safe" stickers may be ordered from the Archdiocese's Safeguard the Children Office by emailing or calling Tim Olshefski at: tolshefski@la-archdiocese.org or (213) 637-7508. For particular help, you may call Assistance Ministry, (213) 637-7650.

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On the cover:

■ Vietnamese drummers bring energy to the Religious Education Congress' Gathering Event in Anaheim March 23 (large photo); A girl receives Communion from Pope Benedict XVI during Mass at Antonio Maceo Revolution Square in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, March 26 (small photo).

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General Manager: NATALIE JACOB

Editor: MIKE NELSON

Production Manager: JOSÉ VÉLAZQUEZ

(213) 637-7360

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