

Reports, forum

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Catechetical Congress at Velehrad, Czech Republic

National Congress of Catechists in the Czech Republic

On the 26th–28th October 2013, the IX Czech National Catechetical Congress took place at Velehrad, an important place of pilgrimage in the eastern Czech Republic. The Catechetical Congress was held by the Department for Catechesis of the Czech Bishops' Conference under the auspices of Bishop Msgr. Karel Herbst SDB and in collaboration with the diocesan catechetical centres.

This biennial Congress is an important aspect of the pastoral ministry of the Church and it effectively serves to encourage priests and lay catechists in their challenging service. It is a meeting intended for all who share an interest in catechesis, an experience characterized by inspiration and formation, and an opportunity for discussion with experts and other participants. Furthermore, it provides a forum where first-hand experiences are exchanged, where individuals may inspire each other and meet bishops and experts and talk about all aspects the possibilities of catechesis in our country.

The Congress is designed for all who are engaged in catechetical activities in both state and church schools, in parishes, in different communities and in organized leisure activities. The programme is addressed to all catechists, RE teachers, priests, educators, animators, pastoral assistants, and lay persons.

In addition to the specialized lectures and thematic workshops, a practical programme is organized, including a display made by Christian publishing houses of their catechetical tools and materials on offer. Moreover, the event also includes the presentations made by missionary organizations, Christian social networks, and others.

The Jubilee of Saints Cyril and Methodius

The congress theme “Living Faith and the Tradition of Saints Cyril and Methodius” corresponded with the current jubilee celebrating the 1150 years since the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius on the territory of today’s Czech Republic. This anniversary is especially important for the Church in the Czech Republic.

For this reason, the village of Velehrad was chosen as the venue of this congress, since it was there that the brothers Cyril and Methodius came in the 9th century from Thessaloniki at the invitation of Prince Rostislav and it was there that they started their apostolate among the Slavs. Probably, the grave of Archbishop Methodius is situated in Velehrad. Their mission was therefore essential for the spread of Christianity and the development of Christian culture among the Slavs¹. On 31st December, 1980, Pope John Paul II declared the two brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius co-patrons of Europe and “pioneers of evangelization of Eastern Europe”².

For three years, the Czech Church had been intensively preparing for this anniversary. Each year was dedicated to one of the sacraments of initiation as a reminder that none of us is born as a Christian, but we become Christians through the grace of God and we are fully initiated by the sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist³.

¹ Homily of Cardinal Josip Bozanić during the National pilgrimage to Saints Cyril and Methodius at Velehrad, 5th July 2013. www.ado.cz/clanek/poselstvi-papeze-frantiska-homilie-kardinala-bozanice (03.02.2014).

² See *Egregiae virtutis*, *The Apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II*, 31st December 1981, 1: AAS 73 (1981), p. 258.

³ See Pastoral letter on the preparations of the jubilee commemorating the 1150 years since the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius (21st February 2010), www.apha.cz/pastyrsky-list-k-pripravam-1150-vyroci-prichodu-cyrila-a-metodeje (03.02.2014).

The Congress “Living Faith and the Tradition of Saints Cyril and Methodius”

The congress, however, was focused not only on the celebration of the anniversary of Saints Cyril and Methodius, but it also reflected upon the “Year of Faith”, the Synod on the New Evangelisation and the needs of the local Church. The speakers included several distinguished personalities from the Czech Catholic intellectual environment and from the field of pastoral care in the nation.

Cardinal Dominik Duka OP and Mons. Professor Tomáš Halík dealt with the issue of contemporary agnosticism and the dialogue with non-believers and seekers. Mons. Jan Graubner contextualized the actions of Saints Cyril and Methodius within the contemporary pastoral-catechetical practice. Associate Professor Petr Kubín discussed Saints Cyril and Methodius in their historical context, especially how they were perceived in medieval hagiography.

The set of lectures on “The tradition of Saints Cyril and Methodius and the faith of today’s young people” was prepared by scholars from the Centrum Aletti, whose aim is to research the relationship between faith, culture and art, as well as spirituality, new evangelization and pastoral themes with regard to the Christian tradition of the East and the West.

On the last morning Ludmila Bartůšková, MD., explored the obstacles to faith from a psychological point of view. Associate Professor Aleš Opatrný questioned whether a crisis of faith is an obstacle to evangelization.

The organized practical workshops showed not only specific teaching examples and inspiring models (as for example, work with multimedia in catechesis for youth, biblical stories in religion classes, catechesis with adults, the use of Christian magazines in specific catechetical situations, spiritual inspiration and “Scripture as the GPS in life”), but also a practical demonstration of a local educational programme for schools, which took place on the actual site of the shrine of Velehrad – the exteriors, the basilica and the former monastery, now a grammar school. Furthermore, a meeting of those responsible for a programme “School entries” in several dioceses took place.

A training course was also offered (E-learning course “Methodology of the work with the Bible with children of school age”), the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies was presented, as well as several Christian magazines for children and youth. The Congress was medially supported by the *Katolický*

týdeník (Catholic Weekly), which dedicated the current thematic section to catechesis in the Czech Republic.

Conclusion

The congress was attended by over 250 catechists, as well as about 30 priests, two bishops and a cardinal. The audio recordings of the lectures are available (not only) to catechists, while the book of the conference proceedings will be available in spring 2014.

The Congress was financially supported by the Foundation Renovabis and each diocese provided its participants with financial or logistical support.