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Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the Vatican nuncio to the United States, speaks during the opening revival night of the National Eucharistic Congress, July 17 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (OSV News/Bob Roller)



by Brian Fraga

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Focusing his remarks on the need for unity in the Catholic Church, the Vatican's ambassador to the United States told the tens of thousands of people who gathered in Lucas Oil Stadium for the 10th National Eucharistic Congress' opening ceremony on July 17 that "building bridges of unity" will be a sign of "authentic eucharistic renewal" in the United States.

"Christ wants to be a bridge, a bridge between people who are members of the same human family, children of the same father in heaven, whose destiny is to be united in love in the same eternal household," Cardinal Christophe Pierre said in his opening address.

Pierre, the five-day event's first keynote speaker, also used his speech to remind the Catholics who are participating in the congress from all across the United States that the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist extends beyond the bread and wine of the sacrament itself.

"Christ is also present in the assembly of his believing people," Pierre said. "Not only that, but he's present to people who struggle to connect with him because of the wounds of fear and sin."

Appointed by Pope Francis in 2016 to be his apostolic nuncio to the United States, Pierre emphasized several themes that Francis has made a priority, such as accompanying people on the peripheries of church life and engaging in synodal listening as an important tool of discernment.



Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the Vatican nuncio to the United States, gestures as he speaks during the opening revival night of the National Eucharistic Congress, July 17 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

On eucharistic adoration, a traditional devotion that has been at the center of the U.S. Catholic bishops' three-year National Eucharistic Revival, Pierre said the practice is "essential to our relationship with Christ," but he added that it is "important that we treat it as that, a relationship."

"If in the act of eucharistic adoration, we were to look at the sacrament merely as an object to be admired, then we'd be remaining, as it were, on the outside," said Pierre, who added that eucharistic adoration needs to spill over into people's daily lives to how they engage people.

"Relating to Christ in this way allows us to relate to others, in a way that realizes the presence of God in them," said Pierre, who also challenged Catholics to extend the practice of their faith beyond devotional exercises.

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He said encountering Jesus in the Eucharist should open Catholics to encountering people in their lives. "This means seeing [Christ] everywhere we go," Pierre said. "It means meeting him in the interactions we have with others. Not only is he present in our family, friends, and communities, but he is also present in our encounters with people from whom we would otherwise consider ourselves divided."

Said the nuncio: "This might include people from a different economic class or race; people who challenge our way of thinking; people whose perspective is formed from experiences that differ greatly from our own. When we encounter such people, when the competitive logic of the world urges us to become defensive, Christ is present to be a bridge."

Opening ceremony underway at the National Eucharistic Congress.

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The nuncio's remarks garnered applause from the thousands of lay, clergy and religious Catholics who filled about three-quarters of the football stadium, which provided the setting for an opening ceremony that included a procession, eucharistic exposition and benediction, as well as speeches and musical performances.

An estimated 50,000 people are in Indianapolis for the event, the first national eucharistic congress in the United States in 83 years. Organizers said attendees have arrived from all 50 states and 17 countries, speaking 43 languages and ranging in ages from newborn infants to a 96-year-old person.

Organizers also told reporters that about 200 bishops and cardinals and 500 seminarians from around the country are taking part in the congress, which is featuring several liturgies, panel discussions, breakout presentations, keynote speeches and recitations of the rosary.



Bishop Andrew Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota, chairman of the board of the National Eucharistic Congress, Inc., carries the monstrance in a procession during Eucharistic adoration at the opening revival night, July 17, of the 10th National Eucharistic Congress at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (OSV News/The Criterion/Sean Gallagher)

During the opening ceremony on July 17, four groups of young adult Catholics who since May had been walking to Indianapolis from different regions in the United States entered Lucas Oil Stadium to a loud ovation. A few minutes later, Bishop Andrew Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota, processed into the arena carrying a large monstrance, which he knelt in front of for several minutes while praise and worship music rang out.

After a period of prayer in which the entire stadium fell silent, Cozzens, who has been the U.S. bishops' point man for the eucharistic revival, spoke while kneeling in front of the monstrance. He prayed for the success of the eucharistic revival and congress, which the bishops hope will revitalize the Catholic Church in the United

States.

"We've prayed for our country and for our church and we've brought their prayers here," Cozzens said, adding that over the previous two years of the revival that organizers had already seen "miracles."

Said Cozzens, "We've seen deep conversions, we've seen people young and old return to the faith, we've seen healing, spiritual and physical healings. Lord, we hope to see more."

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