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The opening of the press conference was made by the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima, António Marto, who started by evoking the presence of Pope Francis in the International Anniversary Pilgrimage, in May 2017, as the “highest moment” of the canonization of Francisco and Jacinta Marto.

“This moment proved the relevance, in a unique way, of the prophetic dimension of the Message of Fatima, with its historical impact and highlighted the internationalization of the Message and also the internationalization of the Shrine, that received and spreads the Message” said the bishop of Leiria-Fatima, while reminding the presence of pilgrims from all over the world in Cova da Iria and the “exponential growth” of asian pilgrims, specifically from China.

This increase of pilgrims from Asia was one of the reasons that led the prelate to invite the Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong to the International Anniversary Pilgrimage of May 2018, prelate who “represents the catholic Chinese and the asian axis, that is emerging

from the standpoint of the Catholic Church."

"We are living a delicate and promising moment between the Holy See and China, regarding a dialogue that can pave the way to the recognition of the Catholic Church in that country. Therefore, this will be one of the intentions of this International Pilgrimage, with the request for the intercession of Our Lady so that this dialogue can be productive and successful." He explained.

"Still on the asian continent, the bishop of Leiria-Fatima, mentioned the current political situation of the Korean Peninsula, where "there was a spark of hope with respect to nuclear disarmament". In this regard, the bishop António Marto recalled the visit to South Korea made by the Pilgrim Statue, during which it passed by a church dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima, located on the border with North Korea.

Within the subject of peace, the bishop Antonio Marto recalled the "absurd war that goes on for eight years in Syria, in particular the fatalities of this conflict: the displaced people and the refugees and evoked, as an encouragement for the end of all wars, the proximity with the 100 years of the end of the First World War, conflict that is so evident in the Message of Fatima.

At an ecclesial level, the prelate recalled: the recent Apostolic Exhortation "Gaudete et Exsultate" on the call to the holiness of the people; the next Consistory, during which the Holy Father will announce the canonization of the Pope John Paul VI, the first Pope who visited Fatima; and also recalled the Day of Social Communications, that is celebrated tomorrow, acknowledging the "noble mission of social peace" undertaken by the professionals of this area.

"I ask you to pray to Our Lady for China as well"

In the press conference, the Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong thanked to António Marto the invitation to preside to the first International Anniversary Pilgrimage of 2018, considering his presence as an opportunity to reflect upon the devotion of the Chinese to Our Lady of Fatima".

"The constant calls to peace, conversion of proclamation of Christ, that Our Lady made in Fatima, give us courage to cope with life, to persevere in faith and undertake, with joy and hope, the path to Jesus", said the prelate, while recalling the contact that he had with the Message of Fatima, in his initial training in the Minor Seminar of Macao.

"The Church in Macau still celebrates today the 13th of May, which also gathers pilgrims from Hong Kong and neighboring cities. The Marian prayers encourage the catholics to deepen their faith and represent an occasion to evangelize".

The Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong also mentioned the celebrations associated with the devotion of Our Lady of Fatima that took place in Hong Long and Taiwan, in particular those that happened during the year of the Centenary of the Apparitions, which was celebrated with joy in several parishes.

While putting in context the Marian devotion in that part of the globe, the bishop John

Tong outlined the “problematic situation” that the Catholic Church lives in China.

“The Chinese government is setting the stage for creating a new autonomous national church, through a patriotic association, through governmental sanctions and religious laws. The State authority is trying to achieve this goal by implementing restrictive measures, applied in the social and ecclesiastical life, what makes the experience of faith even more difficult”.

Despite the scenario, the Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong showed confidence in the reality of the Catholic Church in China, specifically in a line of dialogue which is being reestablished between the Holy See and Beijing”.

Upon finishing, John Tong reminded the institution, for Pope Benedict XVI, in 2007, of the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China, on the very day that is celebrated the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians. He also asked to the faithful pilgrims who are attending the Anniversary Pilgrimage to pray to Our Lady for China.

“Our pilgrimage doesn’t have to be a sporadic event, we must practice our faith everyday, following the example of Mary by accepting the will of God like She did. In this pilgrimage, I also ask you to pray to Our Lady for China”.

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