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EarthBeat



A woman walks with her children on a street in Valencia, Spain, Nov. 11, 2024, as they look for a church to provide cleaning products, following heavy rains that caused deadly floods at the end of October. (OSV News/Eva Manez, Reuters)

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The archbishop of Valencia presided over Mass celebrated by the Spanish bishops in the Almudena Cathedral in Madrid Nov. 19 to pray for all those affected by the tragic end-of-October floods in Valencia, Albacete and Cuenca, where over 200 people lost their lives.

"When we think of the deceased and their families who have been broken, of the people who have lost their homes, their jobs ... our feelings are so deep that words seem insufficient to convey a message of hope," Archbishop Enrique Benavent of Valencia acknowledged at the beginning of his homily.

Nevertheless, he expressed his hope that "the presence and prayer of all the bishops who have gathered today to celebrate this Eucharist," taking advantage of the presence of the prelates at the plenary assembly of the Spanish bishops' conference "will help us to bear these moments with more hope, to mitigate the terrible suffering that they are going through."

For this reason, "we hope that the closeness and solidarity of the church will comfort you and that your suffering will be compensated by the affection of all."

But Christians, the prelate added, "cannot limit ourselves to sharing the pain. If we were to stop there, we would be the most unfortunate of all men. We want, above all, to share hope."

At the beginning of the Mass, attended by civil and religious authorities and packed with Madrid's faithful, Archbishop Luis Argüello of Valladolid, president of the Spanish bishops' conference, addressed those present, highlighting the importance of "personal charity" toward people who have suffered the effects of storm DANA but also "social and political charity, essential when addressing reconstruction and care."

Argüello opened the bishops' plenary Nov. 18 by offering a prayer "for the eternal rest of those who died as a result of the fierce floods in Valencia, Albacete and other

places in our land."

During his speech, the archbishop of Valladolid rejected looking for those responsible for the tragedy, although he has mentioned some debates that have taken place in society due to the devastating consequences of the storms.

"There is talk," he said, "of prevention and warning technology, of the coordination of responses in the autonomous state, of the relationship between politicians and the calculating and politicking use of everything that happens."

"Who should we look to?" Argüello asked.

Not directly naming the government, he however blasted the political follow-up to the biggest peacetime disaster in the country, saying that "in recent days we have seen the plunder and populism of anti-politics."

The anger of survivors was visible as the Spanish royal couple visited the affected areas at the beginning of November.

"This government needs to go. Felipe, there are dead people out there, dude," one man told the king, according to press reports.

King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia, despite mud being thrown toward them and despite security concerns, continued to walk through the crowd, comforting and calming people, many of whom said that the mud and anger were not for the royals, but for Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, whom officials rushed from the scene soon after his contingent started to walk the streets of one of the hardest-hit areas, The Associated Press reported.

The Catholic royals came back to the ground zero zone Nov. 19, meeting those affected and informing them about the progress of support for those affected.

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Argüello stressed in his speech that "the tragedy has reawakened a common and fraternal soul, a desire to share and help, a gift that is not 'commercial' and a commitment that is not a 'vote.' The state and the market need the gift to regenerate themselves and abandon all messianic pretensions." He added that the "fraternity exercised in these weeks is an indicator of the goodness that dwells in

the human soul as the appropriate response to our irremediable vulnerability.”

Coming back to politics again, Argüello said that not only in Spain, but worldwide politics is characterized "by the lack of encounter and dialogue, which are nullified by populist and polarized dialectics, in a cultural climate of post-truth."

He urged society "to renounce the post-truth that legitimizes lies as a political instrument and, on the other hand, to turn the tables on a culture that favors individualism, the right to have rights, and disengagement as a liberating project for individuals, identities, and social groups of all kinds."

Before the plenary of the Spanish bishops started, Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, visited Valencia in a gesture of solidarity with the suffering region.

"Here the church does not speak, it acts," the cardinal said. "And the church prioritizes what the people need," Czerny said in the affected city Nov. 15.

He was speaking from inside a parish church converted into an operational center for volunteers, during his visit to the areas most affected by storm DANA that caused disastrous floods.

The cardinal shared his astonishment at seeing "a temple that is a warehouse for people to eat and clean themselves," but without losing an "impressive atmosphere of faith, prayer and hope." He also congratulated the Catholics in the area for "the fact that the church and the volunteers have been the first and even the only ones to respond."

Czerny stressed that "this teaches us something of what the life and service of the people of God should be."

He visited the Our Lady of Sorrow parish and school, one of eight schools in the area but the most affected by the flood.

"It was completely destroyed. The force of the water broke the walls and the classrooms were destroyed," the parish priest, Father Jesús Cerver, told the cardinal as he examined how high the water reached.

Caritas Valencia raised $13,6 million for the needs of people affected throughout the diocese. In an unprecedented outpour of support, 591 volunteers in 54 parish Caritas offices distribute help to people that lost homes, jobs and, above all, their loved

ones.