

First day of LA Congress invites attendees to 'Enter the Mystery'

Porsia Tunzi | Feb. 22, 2013 NCR Today

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Our church, more often than it should, feels cold and dark.

The archdiocese of Los Angeles is facing trying times. Many wonder, what now?

Where is the light in a church that seems to have lost its way, a church that sometimes forgets its message of love and justice?

LA Congress attendees have been invited to 'Enter the Mystery' of God at the Anaheim Convention Center over the course of this weekend.

In her opening remarks, Sr. Edith Prendergast, director of LA Congress, invited the vast crowd to 'be awakened to the mystery of [being at Congress] and the mystery of our deepest yearnings.'

'The theme of mystery,' Prendergast continued, 'flows through the transfiguration ... an encounter with the living God.'

This mystery reminds us that God is not only present in our everyday life, but can work in many ways -- that darkness and light can somehow coexist.

Prendergast's words were welcomed with immense applause, a testament to the persistent and hopeful life of the church gathered in the arena Friday morning.

Nearly 30,000 people from all over the world are expected to attend LA Congress 2013. Booths line the exhibit hall, including various ministries, religious orders, publications, and vendors.

Tony Melendez, a guitarist who was born with no arms and plays with his feet, gave a talk titled, 'An Armless Embrace of Hope.' Through tears, he said, 'Jesus will drag you through those difficult times -- whatever they may be.'

'Look -- here I am, an armless guy -- to offer an armless embrace of hope,' Melendez said. The audience stood in applause, and he began to sing and play guitar, inviting the crowd to join him in song.

'Reach out and hug a stranger -- just do it,' he said, 'Welcome each other, love each other.' So I set down my notepad and hugged the person in front of me -- the mystery of God was present, there was no doubt.

This is merely a small picture of the first day of LA Congress, but I can see that the mystery of God -- even in darkness -- is at work.

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