

**Homily of Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão at the Inaugural Mass of the  
60th Anniversary of the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila**

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## Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is a story told in many parts of Asia, about a wise old bamboo that grew by the banks of a river. One day, the river asked the bamboo to surrender a part of itself, so that he, the river, could carry it downstream, to other lands, thirsty for shade and peace.

The bamboo was puzzled. “Why would I let myself be cut?”—he asked. The river replied, “because you could grow in other places too, only if you let me take you there.”

After some hesitation, the bamboo agreed and allowed a piece of itself to be carried by the river. Part of that piece became a staff in the hand of a weary traveller kilometres away. Another part became a flute in the hands of a child. Other parts sprouted here and there, along the riverbank, growing new shoots that gave new life to the old bamboo and allowed it to enrich other lands as well.

My dear brothers and sisters, today we celebrate 60 years of the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), an institution that, like the bamboo, has stood tall and firm by the river of God's grace here in Manila, spreading its shoots throughout East Asia and beyond. Rooted in faith, it has shaped leaders, formed pastors and

East Asia and beyond. Rooted in faith, it has shaped leaders, formed pastors and sent forth missionary disciples across the continent. It has allowed itself to be shaped by the Spirit, so that the Church in Asia might flourish in every corner.

And now, we gather this evening, not simply to look back in nostalgia, but to reflect on how we too — as individuals, as communities and as a Church — are called to be rooted, to be formed, and to be sent. Just as Christ sent out His disciples, so too the EAPI has sent out many into the harvest. Today, we give thanks for its glorious past, and we re-commit ourselves to the mission that still lies ahead.

Today is also the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, the day the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, body and soul, into heaven. What does this mystery tell us today?

When Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the moon 56 years ago, he made a statement that became famous. He said, “this is one small step for man, but one giant leap for mankind.” Humanity had reached new heights then. But today, in Mary’s Assumption into Heaven, we celebrate an infinitely greater step or leap. This daughter of the Earth set foot in Paradise, not only in spirit but with her body as well, with all of herself. This step of the Virgin of Nazareth was a much greater leap forward for humanity. The fact that one of us dwells in flesh in Heaven gives us tremendous hope, a hope that does not disappoint us, a hope that we shall one day be where our Mother has gone to be. In Mary, the goal has been reached, and we have before our eyes the path we need to journey on, in hope.

The Bull of Indiction, issued by Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year 2025, sets the spiritual tone and practical framework for the Jubilee, inviting the faithful to be pilgrims and living signs of Hope in a world that builds walls where bridges are needed and that no longer listens to the voice of the vulnerable.

Mary shows us the way to be Hope in this world. She journeyed closely with Jesus and, like Him, became a witness and a sign of Hope throughout her life:

First, through her attitude of loving care: we see this displayed during the wedding feast at Cana, when she realised that the family was in an embarrassing predicament, which made her jump into action and come to their rescue;

Second, through her attitude of joyful service: it was with deep joy and genuine concern that she rushed to the house of her cousin Elizabeth, to be of humble service to her in the time of need;

Third, through her attitude of mercy and compassion: knowing that the apostles of her Son had abandoned him when he needed them most, she forgives them wholeheartedly and, forgetting her own deep sorrow, strengthens them with her presence in the Cenacle.

Mary also stands out as a shining example of synodal discipleship. I see three immediate aspects:

One: she listened. She listened to the angel and through him to God; she listened to her husband Joseph in his silence and particularly in his moments of doubt and uncertainty; she listened to the prophet Simeon in the temple and to her own Son Jesus also in the temple, when he revealed to her that his Father's priorities were all that mattered to him.

Two: she discerned. She discerned God's will and action in the message of the angel, in her own Magnificat, in the message of Simeon, at the foot of the Cross and at Pentecost.

Three: she journeyed. As a missionary disciple, she journeyed to Bethlehem, pregnant with the Son of God. She journeyed to the temple, to offer her Son to his Father, and again to look out for Him when she thought she had lost Him. Finally, she journeyed to Calvary, where her Son erected a bridge between earth and heaven. During her whole life Mary journeyed with her Son. Her sharing in her Son's life was completed by her sharing in His

Ascension with her Assumption into heaven. And she continues to journey, to this day, with humanity and with the Church.

Mary allowed herself to be shaped by the Spirit. She surrendered to God's will with no clear roadmap in view: "Be it done to me according to your word." She allowed the river of God's grace to carry her, as the bamboo did, far from comfort, into service, suffering and, ultimately, glory. In the process, she became a channel of the Holy Spirit to everyone she met, a bearer not only of Christ but of the grace, wisdom and discernment that flow from the Spirit.

Mary was the first disciple, the first missionary, and the first tabernacle. Her Assumption, therefore, is the vindication of a life totally dedicated to God's mission.

In the same spirit, the East Asian Pastoral Institute was born 60 years ago, not for itself, but for the Church in Asia. It began humbly, perhaps like a young bamboo shoot. But it was rooted deeply in prayer, theological reflection, pastoral wisdom and intercultural dialogue.

Over the decades, this Institute became a place of listening, discerning and launching out. It has received men and women from many nations, formed them deeply in the mind and heart of Christ, and sent them back to serve and to become all things to all men, just like the piece of bamboo, carried by the river, became a staff, a flute and so many other things. Countless bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders have passed through these halls, not to become great in the eyes of the world, but to become servants of God's people. Formed in an Asian context, sensitive to culture, justice, peace and dialogue, to this day, they carry the Gospel, in ways uniquely suited to our continent.

And today, we do not only look back. The Church in Asia continues to look forward and to grow in promise . . . and in suffering. We need new Marys today: men and women ready to say "yes" once again, to be formed, to go in haste, to stand at the foot of crosses and to wait for new Pentecosts. They are like the bamboo by the river, like Mary carried to heaven, like the thousands formed here and sent into mission.

We are reminded that formation is not an end. It is a sacred beginning. Mary was formed in silence and obedience before she was assumed in glory. Likewise, our institutions of formation are not monuments, but furnaces: places where the Spirit shapes missionaries for the Church.

So today, we give thanks, not just for 60 years of history, but for the lives touched, the seeds planted, and the missions launched. And we pray that, like Mary, and like the bamboo, we may all have the courage to let go, to be carried by grace and to grow again, wherever God wills.

Amen.

Delivered on August 15, 2025

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CARDINAL FILIPE NERI ANTÓNIO SEBASTIÃO DO ROSÁRIO FERRÃO is the Archbishop of Goa and Daman and seventh Patriarch of the East Indies who has focused on family ministry, interreligious dialogue and social justice, particularly migrants and climate change. He was ordained as an auxiliary bishop of Goa and Daman, before being installed as the 34th Archbishop of Goa and Daman and the seventh Patriarch of the East Indies in March 2004. Pope Francis elevated Ferrão to cardinal on August 27, 2022, making him the first Archbishop of Goa and Daman to be made a cardinal since the establishment of the episcopal see in 1557. As the president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) since January 2025, he is placed in a crucial role for guiding the Catholic Church's efforts in Asia, particularly in relation to the ongoing synodal process initiated by Pope Francis.