Presidential Address
November 17, 2026

Your Excellency, Archbishop Caccia,

Bishop Flores,

Your Eminences,

Dear Brother Bishops,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A few weeks ago, knowing that we would be gathering for this Plenary Assembly,
a friend asked if I had my "State of the Union" address ready.

Although he was teasing me, his question did get me thinking.

There are, of course, several ways to approach this question –
what is the state of this Conference of Bishops?
What is the state of the Church in the United States?
What is the state of the Church in the world?

All these questions, of course, are intertwined.

As a nation, we have just come through a difficult and often contentious election cycle
which yielded, if not surprising, undeniably consequential results.
No matter the results, I want to congratulate those elected and encourage them
to work together promoting the common good and protecting the human dignity of every person.

What a blessing it is, to be able, as Pope Leo did, to cast our ballots and exercise this
fundamental right as citizens of this great nation.

As a Church that exists around the globe,
nearly everywhere, we encounter powerful influences such as secularism,

individualism, and polarization –
the same forces we experience right here, in this country.

These same forces are employed by some
to characterize and interpret what is happening in the Church and in this Conference.

But none of these descriptions are very helpful;
none of them can accurately portray the state of this Conference
nor of the Church in the US or in the world.

These ideas and categories,
are how a secular world interprets things.
Yet these lenses are all too frequently applied when trying
to understand the Church and Church affairs.

This is even true among many within the Church.

Whether among ourselves, or in Catholic media, on social media or among influencers and pundits whose default position is to interpret events and happenings in the life of the Church through political or ideological lenses.

And that is the problem.

For the world thinks in terms of power.
The world sees things through a false binary logic,
a world of yes or no, of left or right, of either/or…

But, as you and I know,
the Church thinks in terms of mission.

Some recent events, and some of the things on our agenda

will serve my point…

Recently, Bishop Flores and I were in Rome
attending a meeting of the Presidents of episcopal conferences
and Eastern churches from around the world
reflecting on the impact of *Amoris Laetitia* ten years after its publication.

Admittedly, I was a little apprehensive going into the meeting.
However, I was struck by how serenely the meetings were conducted and how little energy was expended on the controversial elements that have all too often been an obstacle to a full appreciation and reception of that magisterial teaching.

There were no contentious arguments,
no haggling for points to be made….
no bitter disputes;
rather, we met to share our experiences
around the simple question – what is the state of marriage and family life?
That's not to say there were no differences of opinion or experience. There certainly were.

Rather, this was a time to reflect on a significant problem in our times –
the decline in the number of people
entering into sacramental marriage –
into marriage in general.

For the family is, when properly oriented, the basic structure of society;
it is the primary institution through which a sense of belonging is established
where social skills are reinforced, emotional well-being and love are experienced,
where fundamental values are learned, and which has a fundamental and irreplaceable role in the transmission of life and the passing on of the faith.

During our time together in Rome,

we listened to one another's experiences,
to voices from around the globe,
and we discerned together
various ways to address these challenges and opportunities.

This is not yet the time to share the fruits of those discussions,
that will come soon, I hope. We still await the Holy Father's response to the proceedings of the gathering. He had been unable to participate as much as he had intended due to his cancer diagnosis and surgery.

But I think you can understand my point.

In a world full of noise, overwhelmed by power plays and either/ or thinking
what is lost?

Many things, of course, but I believe that one fundamental loss
is the loss of hope.

When the focus is on winning, on maneuvering to gain power,
what is lost is a sense of communion
and shared purpose.

The Holy Father has made this same point many times,
particularly in his encyclical, *Magnifica humanitas*:

Pope Leo compares two building projects –
the building of the Tower of Babel,
and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah.

One is a worldly project, with worldly ambitions
and leads to confusion, isolation, and dehumanizing violence.

The other, the Holy Father describes,
as a **construction site of hope**.[1]

That is the mission of the Church!
That is our mission.

The mission is to make known the words of the Lord
spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:
For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—
plans for your welfare and not for woe,
so as to give you a future of hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

To a world that is deprived of a sense of hope,
where isolation, depression, confusion, and anger all come into play,
in such a world
the mission of the Church is to act as
a construction site of hope
where hope is rooted in Christ and his promise.

I see our work being carried out in four concentric construction sites.

The first is rebuilding the family.

We need to continue in a new way
our work in promoting family life,
which starts with strong marriages –
especially sacramental marriages.

[1] *Magnifica humanitas,* no. 185.

This will require a new vision of how
to prepare and accompany couples, beyond marriage preparation programs,
beyond the wedding day,
into fully and fruitfully living out a life-long commitment.

As the Holy See has been developing,
one such way can be an approach
that uses our experience of the catechumenate.

The world sees marriage as a transaction;
but we know it is the foundation for a life
of love and fidelity; not a transaction, but a covenant;
we need to share that knowledge and experience more broadly
and with renewed vigor and confidence.

A second construction site of hope is worship.

We have all seen the rich and varied fruits of the recent
Eucharistic revival, which culminated in the Eucharistic Congress.

We need to build on that foundation
with intense and intentional liturgical formation of clergy and laity alike.

As Pope Francis noted in his Apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi,*
"With post-modernity people feel themselves even more lost…"[2]

The solution, he said, is for us
to "return to the cenacle in Jerusalem…
Only the community of men and women —
reconciled because pardoned, alive because He is alive,

[2] *Desiderio desideravi,* no. 28.

true because dwelt in by the Spirit of truth —
can open the cramped space of spiritual individualism."[3]

In providing that liturgical formation to all the faithful
we build on the gift of hope given to us by the Holy Spirit –
a gift that is meant to be shared with the world.

A third construction site of hope for the Church –
is the rediscovery of dialogue and discernment
in the synodal way. These are not just buzzwords, at least they shouldn't be.

I encourage us to develop these skills even more carefully
as we continue to walk together receiving and
implementing the fruits of the recent synod.

Among our presbyterates,
in our pastoral councils,
in our parish visits,
in our work together,
let us continue to start with prayer,
to listen to all the voices,
and to discern, in the words of St. John Climacus,
"a solid understanding of the will of God" in all things.

Finally, a fourth construction site of hope
that we must help develop
is in civic life.

The polarization, isolation, and anger
in our communities and even our families

[3] *Desiderio desideravi,* no. 32.

can only be overcome
when we rediscover a shared hope.

Let us, by word and deed, show how that hope
can be found in a common understanding
of the dignity of human life and of each person; in a renewed appreciation of our magnificent humanity amid the challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence with which we all must grapple and come to terms.

Let us show how that hope
can be found in entering true dialogue
with each other, instead of talking past one another.

Let us show how that hope
can be found by sharing
the principles of the Church's social doctrine.

As the Holy Father wrote,

"Herein lies the proper function of Social Doctrine,
which does not claim to supplant the responsibilities of politics or institutions,
but offers itself as a foundation for collective discernment,
helping to recognize and promote whatever serves
the dignity of persons,
the vitality of communities
and the common good."[4]

Brothers, the state of the Conference is good.
Yes, we have much work to do.
Let's do it together with fraternal respect, renewed cooperation and pastoral charity.

[4] *Magnifica humanitas,* no. 24.

And the state of the Church,
both in the US and in the world,
is also good –
for, as Saint Paul reminded the Corinthians,
love bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails.[5]

Let me finish with the same prayer from our Holy Father,
with which I ended my June address,
for it has stuck with me,

"With the same faith as Mary,
let us become 'weavers of hope' in our world,
sharing who we are and what we have,
so that the presence of Jesus
may grow among us
and his Kingdom take shape."[6] Amen

[5] 1 Cor 13:7-8a.
[6] *Magnifica humanitas*, no. 245.