

HOMILY REFLECTION ON THE CHRISTIAN ROOTS OF EUROPE  
Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union  
Mass at the COMECE HEADQUARTERS, Brussels  
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Thank you, Mons. Mariano and brother bishops of the COMECE, for inviting me to preside this Holy Eucharist. As we celebrate, honour and give thanks to our Guardian Angels today, we continue to pray for Europe, for the European Union, for the European nations and peoples, for the Church in Europe, so that all may find the necessary strength and inspiration to transform huge challenges into fruitful opportunities for renewal and continued shared prosperity.

I'm afraid Spain has poisoned my mind and heart! Or, I should rather say, I suspect that Spain has cast a spell on me!

Or perhaps not. More than Spain pulling me back – as you know I was Apostolic Nuncio there before coming here -, I guess it's more my new mission to the European Union which draws me back to Spain. In fact, when I think of my new mission, the idea of a United Europe, of a Union of European States bound together by common values, a common history, and more than a millennium-old spiritual, cultural and artistic bonds, brings me back to the Camino de Santiago.

The Judeo-Christian roots of Europe may not be formally explicitly recognized in the Treaties of the European Union. But at least, the Preamble of the Treaty of Lisbon affirms that the Union DRAWS INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. Moreover, Article 17 of the same Treaty establishes that *the Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States* (17.1).

As Church, we draw inspiration from the words that Pope John Paul II pronounced during his 1982 Apostolic Visit to Santiago de Compostela, from where he launched this appeal to Europe: ***Desde Santiago, te lanzo, vieja Europa, un grito lleno de amor: Vuelve a encontrarte. Sé tú misma. Descubre tus orígenes. Aviva tus raíces. Revive aquellos valores auténticos que hicieron gloriosa tu historia.***

Besides Rome, in fact, it is hard to find another place that shaped and moulded Europe other than Santiago de Compostela. The Camino was not only a physical route; it was also a meeting place where pilgrims from the Nordic and Slavic countries, from France and Italy and from all over, met, walked together and forged ties that bound Europe.

Indeed, the Camino de Santiago is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1993, in recognition of its immense cultural, historical, and architectural values that spanned more than a millennium. The cathedrals, churches, hospitals, hostels, and let's not forget the cuisine, along the Camino are testaments to the evolution of everything from Romanic to Gothic to Renaissance to Baroque onto our days. As UNESCO itself affirms, the Route of Santiago de Compostela bears outstanding witness to the power and influence of faith among people of all social classes and origins in medieval Europe and later.

Today the Camino continues to preserve its vocation, its essence to be all at once Way and Place, a "Sinodal Place", if you will, where peoples from all over walk together and establish friendships, exchange cultures and mutually enrich themselves. The Camino's many Routes (10 officially declared Routes) laid almost abandoned for a long time, but during the last decades, it has seen a spectacular renaissance. I would say thanks largely to the appeal of Saint Pope John Paul II. Not all taking the Camino are pilgrims strictly speaking, but still this renewed interest is primarily for spiritual and cultural reasons. And, why not? The Camino is perfect for physical fitness!

Even as we are well aware that societies and cultures evolve, let us pray that Europe may stay faithful or close to its roots. This idea of European identity may sound too grandiose and abstract in the midst of all the real and present challenges that demand all the attention and energies of the European leaders and citizens. But that's where the challenge is for us, that's where the importance of our mission lies, namely, in the frenzy of activities on very contingent things, let us help our European leaders and citizens reconnect with the spiritual and cultural roots that underpin the ideals of the Union. Let this be our prayer in this Eucharistic celebration. Amen.