

JOSÉ TOLENTINO CARD. DE MENDONÇA
Build and be bridges
Message to students in Asia and the Pacific
Rome, June 20, 2024

Dear students,

1. It is my great pleasure to greet you on the occasion of this virtual Meeting with the Holy Father, organized by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and Loyola University of Chicago. I am truly honored to have been invited to address a brief greeting on behalf of the Dicastery for Culture and Education to all participants of this event.

Your presence and your reason for being, *here* and *now*, could be understood from a double metaphorical perspective. On the one hand, as Pope Francis wrote, you are *here* to build bridges. On the other hand, with this meeting, you have *now been* called to become bridges.

2. In fact, Pope Francis in his first Apostolic Exhortation wrote that we Christians, and also those who are not, “insist in our intention to respect others, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and to ‘bear one another’s burdens’ (*Gal 6:2*).”¹ Note the verb the Pope used at the beginning of the sentence: *Insist*, that is, to repeatedly urge, to persist or remain firm in something, to repeat or emphasize something. In short, your face-to-face or virtual meetings *here* are precious moments to build bridges —when they do not yet exist—, or to reinforce bridges —when, existing, the need to strengthen it is felt. I think this is important to emphasize: a bridge needs care and attention. Human relationships, if they are not cultivated, end up as just another name on our agenda or as an old memory. It is not enough to build the bridge, it is necessary to clean it, check the foundations, repair small damages, beautify it on special occasions.

3. You are *now* in this meeting to become a bridge. I consider this to be the most important thing and also the most difficult. I say this because being available to others requires overcoming self-referentiality, it requires measuring excessive communication through social networks, welcoming the brother who is at our side, and opening the horizon. Being a bridge is practicing the commandment of love, which Jesus taught us, at any time and in any place, even knowing that , many times, some will use our service/charity without mentioning us. A

¹ FRANCIS , Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* , n. 67. [Translator’s Note: Pope Francis uses in this sentence the Spanish verb *insistir*, to insist, while the official English translation of the document uses “remain steadfast.”]

bridge is built to join two places, but when its presence becomes common, the bridge takes a backseat, without ceasing to offer the function for which it was built. To be bridges, in the words of Saint John the Baptist, is to allow Jesus to grow and the self to decrease (cf. Jn 3:30).

4. I invite you, finally, young people, to live the joy of building *here* and being *now* bridges, especially “where Christ and his message are still virtually unknown”². God bless you.

² JOHN PAUL II , Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* , August 15, 1990, no. 49.