

AMECEA 21st Plenary Assembly – Opening Mass

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily

Nairobi, 19 July 2026

Card. Michael Czerny S.J.

Wisdom 12:13, 16–19; Psalm 86; Romans 8:26–27; Matthew 13:24–43

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's Gospel centres on the reality of the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus tells three parables – the wheat and the weeds, the mustard seed, and the yeast – which clearly distinguish the Kingdom of his Father from all other forms of human organization and governance. Taking a closer look, we realize that the Kingdom is not at all foreign or distant from us – it is very near, already among us –, but it does demand our awareness and, above all, concrete involvement.

In his encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV writes: “The blessing we implore from God and the task that stands before us is [to be] servants of the coming Kingdom” (MH 16). What, then, is this Kingdom that is coming? And how can we be its ‘servants,’ as the Holy Father urges?

Let me begin with the Gospel parable: “The Kingdom of heaven,” Jesus says, “is like a mustard seed” (Mt 13:31). Pope Leo elaborates:

The Christian perspective ... is not limited to denouncing evil. We view history in the light of the crucified and risen Lord, to whom the Father has given ‘all authority in heaven and on earth’ (Mt 28:18). We do not consider the present as a predetermined fate, but an opportunity for personal and collective conversion. Moreover, we believe in the power of the Kingdom, which grows from the tiny size of a mustard seed, [and] which, once sown, sprouts and grows (cf. Mk 4:26-32). While the tumult of confusion is all around us, goodness grows silently from the earth. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?’ (Is 43:19) (MH 210).

With these words, Pope Leo helps us to grasp the meaning of the Gospel parable of the mustard seed. It calls us to live a profound hope, capable of challenging the most negative – though apparently realistic – interpretations of reality, so that we may confidently perceive the strength of a tiny seed which, even amidst many hardships, is able to ‘sprout and grow.’ The Holy Father warns us against a false realism, which is passivity and resignation. Instead, he emphasises the courageous denunciation of evil. As Christians, we are called not to stop at mere denunciation – which is necessary yet insufficient – but to strive to recognise and follow the new paths that the Lord is already opening up before us. Accordingly, our presence here today is seed brimming with hope!

I address myself above all to young people, echoing the words of Pope Francis: “Please do not let yourselves be robbed of hope!” (*Homily*, 24 March 2013). Let us carry in our hearts the appeal of the Gospel image of the seed. Let us ask the Lord to help us learn more and more how to build ‘bridges of hope,’ so that we may both pray and work, “Thy Kingdom come!”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus also says that “The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away” (Mt 13:24–25). This second image is particularly interesting. Notice the attitude of the landowner. When alerted to the unexpected appearance of weeds in his field, he does not insist on immediately uprooting the evil from that soil. Instead, he instructs his farmworkers to wait until harvest time to separate them from the wheat. This is a patient, prudent, and faith-filled attitude. The farmer does not lose sight of the clear opposition of good and evil – and the need to protect the good from the evil. But in order to restore justice, he resists the instincts of quick, facile and punitive measures, risking the destruction of the good wherever it is already laboriously if invisibly sprouting.

This is also Pope Leo’s thinking about the international balance of power, in *Magnifica Humanitas*:

In international relations, dialogue is an irreplaceable diplomatic tool for preventing conflicts and rebuilding bonds of trust. Faced with impulsive broadcasts, aggressive rhetoric and power politics that characterise our time, ‘the vocation of diplomacy is to foster dialogue with all parties, including those interlocutors considered less “convenient” or not considered legitimized to negotiate.’ Therefore, every ounce of humility and patience should be employed

in order to nurture even the faintest signs of goodwill among parties in conflict, so as to advance the process of peace (MH 224).

Dear friends, such a prudent and patient approach, characteristic of God's kingdom, should lead us disciples of Jesus to develop an everyday diplomacy, building bridges amongst ourselves and with everyone, both within the Church and in society! "The world," Pope Benedict XVI affirms, "is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man" (Homily 24.4.2025).

Patience has us to build ever more sturdy 'bridges of communion, hope, justice and good governance' as this assembly theme states. It's too easy to get trapped in rash and unfair judgments. Let's instead admire and imitate the One who is 'sovereign in strength,' yet judges 'with gentleness' and governs 'with great forbearance' as in today's first reading (Wis 12:18).

Finally, the third parable compares the kingdom of heaven with "yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Mt 13:33). This dynamic image clearly encourages a quiet, thorough and truly effective work of transforming situations of suffering and injustice. It is not a matter of making a flashy show of ourselves, but rather of living daily lives quietly transforming the world from within, in deep communion with God and with others.

This, says Saint Paul, is the work of the Spirit working silently and effectively from within, helping us in our weakness and pleading on our behalf with "sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). And this is the "powerful and mysterious action of the Holy Spirit" according to Pope Leo in *Magnifica Humanitas* (MH 2).

Thus, living in the world, we Christians are called to transform and transfigure it in the manner of the Holy Spirit, 'from within'! "Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit," Pope Leo reminds us, "the Church allows herself to be enlightened by God's word, reads the signs of the times, and creatively seeks new ways for relationships between peoples and nations to become ever more conformed to the demands of the Kingdom of God" (MH 91).

Here, then, is the third task entrusted to us: to build authentic 'bridges of communion.' This does not mean indiscriminately imitating or assimilating the ways of the world, diluting our Christian identity or watering down the demands of the Gospel. It is rather to be in the world as a transforming vitality like yeast. For the Holy Spirit brings us into intimate communion with God and, consequently, brings about true communion among us and reaching out to the "other". This is how we truly collaborate in building

the Kingdom, fulfilling our role as 'leaven' in the very different contexts in which we live.

We join Pope Leo in praying for "the same faith as Mary: let us become 'weavers of hope' in our world, sharing who we are and what we have" especially for and with young people, "so that the presence of Jesus may grow among us and his Kingdom take shape" (MH 245). This is the grace of building bridges of communion, hope, justice and good governance for which we pray, during this Holy Eucharist, as a gift from heaven.

Amen.