



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES I, GUAM (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II), JAPAN, ANCHORAGE (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II)
(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE
THE PRESIDENT AND TO THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES***

Mr. President,

1. It gives me great joy to be in the Philippines, and your kind invitation to come to Malacañang honors me greatly. I take this opportunity to express to you my sincere gratitude for everything you have done to make this visit come about, as well as for your generous collaboration in making available to me the many services and facilities that enable me to travel to different parts of the country and to meet as many people as possible on these beautiful islands.

I look upon my stay among the Filipino people as a unique opportunity for learning more about the achievements and aspirations of this blessed nation, for bringing personally a fraternal greeting to the nations of Asia, and for offering support and encouragement to the local Churches of this continent. The enthusiastic welcome which your people have accorded me during this first day of my visit evokes from me the full measure of my *pastoral love and concern for the people of the Philippines*.

Once again, I thank you and, through you, all your fellow-citizens. Maraming salamat po! (Thank you very much, Sir !)

Dear People of the Philippines,

2. In my desire to know personally the peoples of Asia, I wanted my first papal visit to be to the

Philippines. I come here retracing the steps of Paul VI, whose memorable visit to this land is still recalled, I am sure, with love and gratitude, and whose inspiring presence still lives on in the hearts and the minds of the Filipino people. I come here because it is my heart's desire to celebrate with my brothers and sisters the common faith that unites the Catholic population of this land with the See of Peter in Rome. At the same time I mention with satisfaction and pleasure the friendly relations between the Philippines and the Holy See. These relations are indeed a worthy expression of the special affection of your people for the Bishop of Rome.

The Philippine nation is deserving of particular honor since, from the beginning of its Christianization, from the moment that Magellan planted the Cross in Cebu four hundred and sixty years ago, on April 15, 1521, all through the centuries, its people have remained true to the Christian faith. In an achievement that remains unparalleled in history, the message of Christ took root in the hearts of the people within a very brief span of time, and the Church was thus strongly implanted in this nation of seven thousand islands and numerous tribal and ethnic communities.

The rich geographical and human diversity, the various cultural traditions, and the people's spirit of joy and sharing, together with the fruits of the missionary efforts, have successfully blended and have shaped, through periods which were sometimes not devoid of shadows and weaknesses, a clear national identity that is unmistakably Filipino and truly Christian. The attachment to the Catholic faith has been tested under succeeding regimes of colonial control and foreign occupation, but fidelity to the faith and to the Church remained unshaken and grew even stronger and more mature.

3. Due homage must be paid to this achievement of the Filipino people, but what you are also creates an obligation and it confers upon the nation *a specific mission*. A country that has kept the Catholic faith strong and vibrant through the vicissitudes of its history, the sole nation in Asia that is approximately ninety percent Christian, assumes by this very fact the obligation not only to preserve its Christian heritage but to bear witness to the values of its Christian culture before the whole world.

Although small in size of land and population compared to some of its neighbors, the Philippine nation has undoubtedly a special role in the concert of nations, in order to consolidate peace and international understanding, and more particularly in maintaining stability in South East Asia, where it has a vital task.

4. The Filipino people will always draw the strength and inspiration that they need to carry out this task from their noble heritage—*a heritage not only of Christian faith but also of the rich human and cultural values* that are their own. Every man and woman, whatever his or her status or role, must strive in all earnestness to preserve, to deepen and to consolidate these values—these priceless gifts—against the many factors which seriously threaten them today.

Preserve, through your lucid and deliberate efforts, your sense of the divine, your prayerfulness and your deeply religious consciousness. Preserve and reinforce your respect for the role of women in the home, in education and in other challenges of life in society. Keep and strengthen your reverence for the aged, the disabled and the sick. Above all maintain your great esteem for the family.

Preserve the indissolubility of the marriage bond. Keep inviolate the right to life of the unborn child and uphold firmly the exalted dignity of motherhood. Proclaim vigorously the right of parents to be free from economic, social and political coercion, as they endeavor to follow the dictates of an upright conscience in determining the size of their family in accordance with the will of God.

Establish firmly the serious responsibility of parents to raise their children in accordance with their human dignity. Defend the children from corrupting influences and uphold the structures of family life. A nation goes the way that the family goes, and when the integrity and stability of family life is imperiled, so will be the stability of the nation and the tasks it must assume before the judgment of history.

5. The challenge that faces each nation, and more particularly a Christian nation, is a challenge to its own internal life. I am sure that the leaders and the people of the Philippines fully realize their responsibility to construct an exemplary society and that they are willing to work together to achieve this end in a spirit of mutual respect and civic responsibility. It is the joint effort of all the citizens that builds a truly sovereign nation, where not only the legitimate material interests of the citizens are promoted and protected, but also their spiritual aspirations and their culture.

Even in exceptional situations that may at times arise, one can never justify any violation of the fundamental dignity of the human person or of the basic rights that safeguard this dignity. Legitimate concern for the security of a nation, as demanded by the common good, could lead to the temptation of subjugating to the State the human being and his or her dignity and rights. Any apparent conflict between the exigencies of security and of the citizens' basic rights must be resolved according to the fundamental principle—upheld always by the Church—that social organization exists only for the service of man and for the protection of his dignity, and that it cannot claim to serve the common good when human rights are not safeguarded.

People will have faith in the safeguarding of their security and the promotion of their well-being only to the extent that they feel truly involved, and supported in their very humanity.

It is my hope and prayer that all the Filipino people and their leaders will never cease to honor their commitment to a development that is fully human and that overcomes situations and structures of inequality, injustice and poverty in the name of the sacredness of humanity. I pray that everyone will work together with generosity and courage, without hatred, class struggle or fratricidal strife, resist-ing all temptations to materialistic or violent ideologies.

The moral resources of the Philippines are dynamic, and they are strong enough to withstand the pressures that are exercised from the outside to force this nation to adopt models of development that are alien to its culture and sensitivities. Recent initiatives that are worthy of praise augur well for the future, since they manifest confidence in the capacity of the people to assume their rightful share of responsibility in building a society that strives for peace and justice and protects all human rights.

Mr. President, dear friends,

7. The presence of so many representatives of the constituted bodies of national and local government, of the judiciary and the military honors me greatly, and I wish to express to them *the great esteem in which the Church holds those that are invested with responsibility* for the common good and the service of their fellowmen.

How exalted is the mission of those to whom the people have entrusted the leadership of the nation, and in whom they place their trust to see enacted those reforms and policies that aim at bringing about a truly human society, where all men, women and children receive what is due to them to live in dignity, where especially the poor and the underprivileged are made the priority concern of all. Those that are entrusted with the tasks of government do honor to Christianity when they uphold their credibility by placing the interests of the community above any other consideration, and by regarding themselves first and foremost as servants of the common good.

8. In closing these brief remarks, I wish to praise the special qualities of the Filipino people, steeped in a solid Christian tradition of faith and love for neighbor. Throughout your history, you have heeded the appeal of the Gospel, the invitation to goodness, to honesty, to respect for the human person, and to unselfish service.

Your commitment to the ideals of peace, justice and fraternal love holds the promise that the future of this land will match its past history. But the challenge is great and it faces each individual of this land. No one is exempt from personal responsibility. Everybody's contribution is important. Now that we are approaching the end of this second millennium, you must be ready to continue on the road that faith in Christ and his message of love have charted for you.

May God's grace sustain you. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, invoked under innumerable titles and honored in shrines and institutions all over the land, remain forever the loving and caring Mother of the Filipino people. And may her Son, Jesus Christ, the loving and merciful Saviour of mankind, give you the great gift of his peace—now and forever.

Mabuhay ang Pilipinas ! (Long live the Philippines !)

From Manila, 17 February 1981.

*AAS 73 (1981) p. 314-318.

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