



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PHILIPPINES ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT

Friday, 30 November 1990 Your Eminence,

*Dear Brother Bishops,*1. Our meeting today gives me the opportunity to continue the reflections which the *ad Limina* visits of various groups of Philippine Bishops have enabled me to make on themes related to your pastoral ministry. These visits have a specific purpose: the strengthening of hierarchical communion and of commitment to the Church's mission on the part of the Successors of the Apostles. They also manifest the special bond of faith and love which unites the pastors of the particular Churches and the Successor of Peter. I wish to assure you that through your presence I have felt very close to the Filipino faithful. After our private conversations and our prayer together for the Church in your country I "give thanks to God always for you, brothers, as is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing" (2 Thes. 1:3).2. The recent Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences drew attention to conditions in Asia where "change is the most constant factor of (your) societies...traditional values and attitudes are called into question" (Cf. *Final Statement*, 2, 1). In particular, the context in which you are called to evangelize is marked by light and darkness: a strong sense of family life and community, but also a degradation of certain fundamental values, and sometimes a situation of widespread conflict which can foster violence and a loss of trust in political and social institutions. These are some of the characteristics of the "hour" in which the Lord of the harvest sends you into his vineyard (Cf. Jn. 4:35). As the *Final Statement* of the Assembly of the FABC states: "God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges of our world to renew our sense of mission" (*Final Statement*, 3, 0).3. A fundamental challenge facing the Church in your country is that of giving a fresh impetus to the task of bringing the Christian message to society. What is needed is *a deeper and more effective* evangelization. You, more than anyone else, are aware of the vastness and urgency of this task, because you know the extent of the spiritual as well as the material needs of your people. This is a time for the whole Church in the Philippines to renew her fidelity to the Lord, to place her whole trust in him who alone gives supernatural effectiveness to the activities of all those engaged in the pastoral ministry. I am reminded of the exhortation which, in "[Evangelii Nuntiandi](#)", Pope Paul VI addressed to "all those who, thanks to the charisms of the Holy Spirit and to the mandate of the Church, are true evangelizers"; he urged them to "be worthy of this vocation, to exercise it without the reticence of doubt or fear, and not to neglect the conditions that will make this evangelization not only possible but also active and fruitful" (Paul VI, [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), 74). Among these conditions, he gave *priority to the action of the Holy Spirit who is the soul of the Church*, the principal agent of evangelization, the one who explains to the faithful the deep meaning of the teaching of Jesus and of his mystery, who places on the lips of the evangelizer the words he could not find by himself, and who

predisposes the soul of the hearer to be open and receptive to the Good News and to the Kingdom. I wish to encourage you and your Brother Bishops to continue to emphasize *the transcendent mission of the Church*, and not to allow your ecclesial communities to lose sight of *the real nature of the Christian life*, which springs from communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in the life of grace through participation in our Savior's Paschal Mystery.⁴ Evangelization also depends greatly on the evangelizers themselves, who must be genuine witnesses, capable of responding to the thirst for authenticity prevalent among people today. Paul VI reminded evangelizers that the world wants them to speak to it of "a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible" (Paul VI, *Evangeli Nuntiandi*, 76). How appropriate to the Church's life in your own country is Pope Paul's entreaty: "The world calls for and expects from us simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, charity towards all, especially towards the lowly and the poor, obedience and humility, detachment and self-sacrifice. Without this mark of holiness, our word will have difficulty in touching the hearts of modern man" (*Ibid.*)! The evangelizer is a *servant of the truth about God, about man and his mysterious destiny, and about the world*. He should not neglect to study this truth; he should serve it generously, without making it serve him. Above all, the evangelizer should be filled with love for those to whom he is sent: a love that consists in *transmitting the genuine truth of the Gospel* and not doubts and uncertainties born of an erudition poorly assimilated; a love that respects the freedom of conscience and the spiritual situation of others but does not hesitate to engage them in serious dialogue concerning the deeper questions facing individuals and society. Now, fifteen years after "*Evangeli Nuntiandi*" was issued, we cannot fail to be impressed by its continuing timeliness and relevance. I would recommend that when you reflect on your ministry you make that "Magna Charta" of the Church's evangelizing mission a necessary point of reference in relation to your personal responsibilities as Bishops and the responsibilities of your collaborators in the pastoral care of the Churches entrusted to you. A more extensive application of its guidelines throughout the Church is surely necessary, so that "he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply (our) resources and increase the harvest of (our) righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10).⁵ In every country where the followers of different faiths live side by side a great effort must be made to lay the solid bases of a peaceful and harmonious society. Some of you are pastors of communities which are in daily contact with followers of Islam. Interreligious relations between the two communities are generally marked by friendship and cooperation. I am pleased to know that opportunities for dialogue on matters of common interest and on religious themes are not lacking. I would encourage you to *seek agreement with your Muslim brothers and sisters on the fundamental question of religious freedom*. The foundation of mutual respect and understanding among those of different religious beliefs lies in the right of every individual to freedom of conscience. Everyone has an inalienable right and a solemn duty to follow his or her upright conscience in seeking and obeying religious truth. Religious freedom is not a privilege but a requirement of human dignity (Cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2). During my recent visit to Africa I expressed the conviction that "Christians and Muslims can live in harmony and show their solidarity with one another in all the joys, sorrows and challenges that mark the life of a local community. As experience in many parts of the world shows, religious differences of themselves do not necessarily disrupt life together. Indeed, *Christians and Muslims... can be partners in building a society shaped by the values taught by God: tolerance, justice, peace, and concern for the poorest and weakest*" (John Paul II, *Address to the Leaders of Other Confessions and Religions*, 4). This is a task and an objective for which you are called to work concretely and wisely in the interests of all your fellow citizens.⁶ Before concluding this series of meetings with the Bishops of the Philippines I wish to express the Holy See's appreciation of *the humanitarian concern which moved your Government in the past to accept groups of Vietnamese boat-people seeking refuge*. Over the past fifteen years, in line with its profoundly human and Christian traditions and in spite of the great burden involved, your country has been generous in giving such refugees "first-asylum" hospitality. Until an overall and effective solution to the problem of refugees is arrived

at, much human suffering will need to be alleviated. It is my hope that, notwithstanding the difficulties involved, also at the international level, the Philippine Government will continue, where possible, to respond to this tragedy with a sense of universal brotherhood and moral responsibility. I am fully appreciative of what your Episcopal Commission on Migration and Tourism has done in this regard.⁷ Dear Brother Bishops, as you prepare to return to your Dioceses I give thanks to God for the life and ministry of your priests, for the witness and work of the men and women Religious, for the faith and commitment of the laity. I encourage you in your efforts to provide high standards of formation in seminaries, religious houses and centers for the preparation of lay Christian leaders. Nothing of lasting value can be achieved without true knowledge of the faith and adequate religious instruction, capable of responding to the increasingly complex realities of the modern world. *The renewal of mission is a challenge for all the members of the Church.* Let us pray to the Lord for the whole Church in the Philippines that Saint Paul's exhortation may be fulfilled in you: "Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:11-12). May Mary, Mother of the Church, obtain this for you through her loving intercession with Jesus her Son. © Copyright 1990 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana
