



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PHILIPPINES
(MINDANAO AND VISAYAS) ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Saturday, 12 October 1985

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am very pleased to see you gathered here in the company of Cardinal Vidal.

After the private meetings which I have had with each one of you during these days of your “ad Limina” visit, we now have the opportunity to come together in the name of him who appointed us and sent us to bear much fruit (Cfr. *Jo.* 15, 16), our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I greet you with great personal satisfaction, and through you I feel very close to the Filipino people. You are pastors of the regions of Mindanao and Visayas, and soon I will meet the bishops of the other regions of the Philippines. Your presence here is not only the fulfilment of a duty incumbent on all the bishops of the world; it is also the expression of the deeply-felt bonds of faith and loyalty that unite Filipino Catholics to the See of Peter.

I wish to assure you that the pains and sorrows, the joys and hopes of the entire Nation are very much the subject of my concerns and prayers.

1. Our conversations and the reports which you have prepared for this visit show how deeply you feel the responsibility of the task entrusted to your episcopal ministry. At times you may feel weighed down by the mission and by the obstacles which confront your endeavors. But there is one thing of which you are certain and which inspires your trust and confidence. It is the response of Christ to the anxieties of the Apostle Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (*2 Cor.* 12, 9). In this conviction you will find the courage to place your whole lives at the service of the mystery of salvation being accomplished in the midst of your people.

It is fitting, in this context, that together we should raise our voices in joyful, thanksgiving to God,

our heavenly Father from whom all good things come, for the vitality and progress of the Church in the Philippines. Your communities are imbued with life-giving energies, a dynamism which is evident from the numerous institutions, activities and initiatives that have ever marked the uninterrupted development of the Church. There is always room for improvement and correction, but *let us not forget the “great things” which the Lord has done and continues to do in the hearts of the Filipino people*. Like Mary, the whole Church in the Philippines can magnify the Lord for the abundance of his grace (Cfr. *Luc.* 1, 46. 49).

2. Precisely because you are close to the daily life of the members of your local Churches, to their sufferings and aspirations, you have been concerned to offer guidance and leadership to your people in their search for a more dignified human condition and for greater participation in the important choices which affect the life of the nation. *The whole Church is grateful to you for the example of compassion and solidarity with those in need* which you have given and for your encouraging participation in the development and progress of your people.

You are undoubtedly strengthened in your pastoral ministry by the mutual understanding, respect and support which marks the activities of your Bishops' Conference, especially when you gather to discuss the various questions that require attention and collaboration of the whole episcopal body.

On these occasions you deal with the matters that affect your communities *as Pastors of the Church of God*: as bishops, whose principal task is to teach *the whole truth of the Gospel*, to teach *the whole truth about man* (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 12). The full truth about human life and human destiny is to be found in the revelation of the Gospel, in the person of the Incarnate Son of God and through the salvific event of his Death and Resurrection which is made present in every age and place through the mystery of the Church.

3. The community of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is united by a profound bond of life and love. While endeavoring to serve this bond, one cannot place the Gospel message at the service of any objective other than the fullness of life and love emanating from the Paschal Mystery.

The love of which we are speaking is the eternal merciful love of God, which “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (*Rom.* 5, 5). *This love is incompatible with the use of division, opposition, hatred or violence as a program of Christian life or as progress in justice*.

In this regard it is enlightening to re-read certain pages of Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*”. There he reminds us that any reduction of the whole message of salvation preached by the Church deprives her of her “originality” and exposes her “to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems and political parties” (Cfr. PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 32).

In the face of the social, economic and ideological tensions which exist in some of your dioceses you have to be wise and courageous in order to remain faithful to Christ, the Chief Shepherd of the flock (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 5, 4). Time and again you have to proclaim that no merely temporal and imminent liberation can be the object of the Church's evangelizing mission. Does this mean that the Church has no message of liberation to proclaim to those who long for release from whatever forms of oppression or injustice are diminishing their God-given dignity? Or that the Church in the Philippines has no concrete contribution to make to development, peace and progress?

Here again the words of "[Evangelii Nuntiandi](#)" are an authoritative statement of the Church's real participation in the cause of genuine liberation. They also indicate the means to be used if the end result is to be truly for the benefit of peoples and not to their detriment. In fact the Church "is providing . . . Christian 'liberators' with the inspiration of faith, the motivation of fraternal love, a social teaching which the true Christian cannot ignore and which he must make the foundation of his wisdom and of his experience in order to translate it concretely into forms of action, participation and commitment. All this must characterize the spirit of a committed Christian, without confusion with tactical attitudes or with the service of a political system. The Church strives always to insert the Christian struggle for liberation into the universal plan of salvation which she herself proclaims" (PAULI VI [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), 38).

4. Sometimes a concept of a Church "of the people" is contrasted with the concept of the "institutional" Church, as if the latter had as it were failed in her mission and were now an enemy of human development and even of the Gospel message itself, while the former is expounded as the true source of hope and happiness.

The fallacy in such a presentation is evident. The Church is the sacrament of salvation only if she continues to be all that her divine Founder intended. In a very special way it is incumbent upon bishops, individually and collectively, to penetrate ever more fully the divine and human mystery of the Church. In this task we have the splendid teachings of the Second Vatican Council to guide us, in particular the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "[Lumen Gentium](#)".

As bishops we are entrusted with the *task of proclaiming and defending the whole of the Church's teaching in all its authenticity*. We must also be vigilant that others who preach and teach in the name of the Church should not be allowed to distort that teaching, to the consequent confusion and disturbance of the consciences of the faithful.

This matter will often be for you a source of suffering and trial. *You will sometimes be a sign of contradiction*. Your love in these cases, sometimes for your closest collaborators, will be a love marked by forgiveness, patience, forbearance and courage. Your love should not become a false compassion that ends by undermining the truth and destroying the very harmony that it claims to preserve. The pastoral love that you have for your communities sometimes demands that you should not hide the "hard sayings" (Cfr. *Io.* 6, 60) which bridge the distance between sinful human

nature and the moral requirements of life in the Spirit of Christ.

May the Lord Jesus send comforting gifts of the Holy Spirit as you speak in his name and guide your local Churches along the path of life and love!

5. In many of your dioceses the Catholic faithful live side by side with members of the Muslim faith. Here and there certain tensions have arisen in the area of political aspirations. Yet, on the basis of the common bond of faith in the Most High God and out of respect for one of the world's great religious traditions, your local Churches are actively maintaining good relations with the Muslim community and are already offering a fruitful collaboration and service in educational and social activities. It is important to make further progress along this path of mutual understanding and harmony.

I would repeat to the Church in the Philippines what I said to a gathering of Muslim young people during my recent visit to Morocco: "Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more necessary than ever . . . I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognize with joy the religious values that we have in common, and give thanks to God for this fact . . . I believe that, today, God invites us *to change our old practices*. We must respect each other, and also we must stimulate each other in good works on the path of God" (Cfr. "L'Osservatore Romano", edit. anglica, die 16 sept. 1985, pp. 6-8).

6. You are well aware that the success of your ministry greatly depends on the faith and Christian life of your collaborators, especially your *priests, and the men and women Religious and catechists* who work strenuously at your side in the task of evangelization. In this respect we cannot forget the generation of Missionaries, men and women, who have served the Church in the Philippines with generous dedication. I wish to assure the missionary personnel who are working in your local Churches that their pastoral collaboration is necessary and appreciated.

Priests and Religious in particular should be encouraged "to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him" (*Col.* 1, 10). They will pray and should also be seen to pray; thus they give primacy to the power of the grace of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in their pastoral activities. In this respect they will greatly benefit from *willing and attentive recitation of the Divine Office*, which is the prayer of Jesus himself, who joins the entire community of mankind to himself in this canticle of divine praise (Cfr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 83). Then too, *the importance of the Sacrament of Penance* in their own personal quest for holiness of life cannot be overstated. In all of this you must assist them by your example and leadership.

The progress that the Church in the Philippines is making in providing new seminaries for the large numbers of vocations with which you are blessed, and new centers of formation for all those who respond to Christ's invitation to work in his vineyard, heightens the need to ensure that priority be given in this formation to *genuine spirituality and fidelity to the teachings of the Church*. For this

task you have a wealth of guidelines in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and in the relevant documents of the Holy See.

And you must present to your seminarians an image of the priesthood that truly corresponds to their future role in the Church, a role which follows from their configuration with Christ. They must be shown that the life they have chosen is not a mere profession or form of employment. They should be encouraged and trained to live their vocation with joy and in the liberating generosity of total abandonment to God. And a sense of justice in their regard tells us that from their first days in the seminary they should be instructed in the value of celibacy in the service of Christ and his Kingdom (Cfr. *Optatam Totius*, 10).

Likewise I wish to say to you that I am fully convinced that a bishop will be successful as the pastor and father of the flock entrusted to him only if he gives the greatest attention and energy to cultivating personal, friendly and frank contacts with his priests, with Religious, and with the laity who make their own specific and irreplaceable contribution to the good of the local Church.

7. My brother Bishops, there are many other matters which deserve our attention. Some of them I will touch upon when I have the pleasure of meeting the other members of your Conference, in the same fraternal manner in which I have sought to express my thoughts to you.

I know that the challenges which face you are not small. In this respect I wish to recall the tragic deaths of Father Tullio Favali of the PIME Fathers, and of Father Alberto Romero. And I cannot but share with you my deep personal concern for the fate of the Redemptorist Father Rudy in Cebu on July 11 of this year.

But *your trust is in Christ*. You can be confident too of the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, who is so greatly loved and honored by the Filipino people. This year you are celebrating a special Marian Year, a time of grace and devotion which manifests the very soul of your people and shows how deeply the faith of the Church has penetrated the temperament of the Nation.

In my prayers I commend to Mary's loving care the whole Church in the Philippines, and I ask her to gain for you and your people the gifts of peace and reconciliation.

Finally, I avail myself of this occasion to say a word of appreciation to Archbishop Mabutias, the President of your Conference, as he approaches the end of his term. I join with you all in giving recognition to the zeal and energy with which he has carried out the many burdens of that office. May the God of peace amply reward him!

From January Cardinal Vidal will be your next President, and I take this opportunity to wish him every success in that office. I know that you will give him your fullest cooperation and assistance.

And may grace and peace be multiplied to you all! (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 1, 2).

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