



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)

HOLY MASS FOR THE COMMUNITY OF DAVAO

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Philippines

Friday, 20 February 1981

Dear brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. The vibrant sound of our voices rending the air of this growing city of Davao, in this rapidly developing island of Mindanao, as we sing the praises of God through and in our Lord Jesus, recalls to us our Lord's voice addressed to the first Apostles saying : "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you ; and so, I am with you always to the close of the age".[1]

Jesus, who was himself sent by the Father, was in turn sending his Apostles : "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you"[2]. Since then, there has been no interruption in the sending and going forth : "and they went forth and preached everywhere"[3]. Since then, too, there has been an unceasing ecclesial or communitarian response of those who believe and are baptized. The Acts of the Apostles tell us : "So those who received his word were baptized ... And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"[4].

From the foregoing we can see already the communitarian nature of the Church which would be formed by all nations being gathered into one. Believers would be bound to each other by faith and fellowship, by the breaking together of bread and common prayers. *Those who believe would form*

one Church, one community.

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, I cannot describe to you how overjoyed I am to be with you today in this Eucharistic celebration. As the one chosen by God's providence to be the Vicar of Christ on earth and the Successor of Saint Peter in the Apostolic See of Rome, I am celebrating with you, in a place thousands of miles away from Rome, the Sacrifice of the Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and Resurrection. We are proclaiming together the mystery of faith : that "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again".

This is indeed a unique moment of deep fulfilment. For we are gathered here as Pastor and Flock, as a Church, as the Body of Christ, where there are varieties of service but the same Lord, where there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one ; where to each is given the same manifestation of the Spirit for the common good^[5]. I see in your characteristically Filipino faces, filled with wonder, the faces of children of our common Father, brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ. But I also see in your faces the pain that is linked to the memory of all those who suffered and died during the recent floods that ravaged six provinces of this island.

I offer to all of you the expression of my sympathy for the loss of your loved ones, my prayers for the dead and the injured and the homeless, and my encouragement as you face the future with the burdensome task of reconstructing, with God's grace, your homes and your lives. I see in all of us, assembled here in our Lord's name, the one family of God, the new People of God, building together—each according to his respective role but always in ecclesial solidarity—the Body of Christ in joy and in sorrow.

2. This Eucharistic assembly, composed of us coming here from the West and you of Davao and Mindanao representing the only Catholic country in the East, is a synthesis of our Lord's desire, our Lord's command, and our own response. Our Lord desired to gather all nations into one Flock under one Shepherd. His command was to make disciples of all nations, East and West, and our response is this vast multitude of people of varied tongues and color, of varied cultures and status, *united in ecclesial communion to share the word of God and the Bread of eternal life*. Here around your Archbishop and around the table of God's word and the Eucharistic Sacrifice you form your local Church, your local ecclesial community.

You are united in the unity of one faith and one worship and in that bond of love which is the distinctive mark of the true disciples of Christ : " By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"^[6].

This ecclesial community on the diocesan level, with the Bishop as the sign and center of unity, is nourished constantly by loyal adherence to the word of God and to an authentic worship according to that basic relationship between faith and worship : "lex orandi, lex credendi". It is also

strengthened by the bond of love among the members, and by the conscious participation of all members according to the gifts each one has received for the building up of the local Church.

3. The same ecclesial life on the diocesan level is reflected on the parish level. The same variety of gifts and ministries contributes to the one mission of building up the Body of Christ. The same consciousness of being a member of an ecclesial community prevails.

On the parish level a truly meaningful ecclesial communion and participation is experienced day after day. *It is in small Christian communities where the members know each other more personally that true love and fraternal concern is more easily practised.* The affliction and need of a brother or a sister whom one knows and sees every day moves the human heart to love and compassion. Conversely, we are less inclined to have love and compassion for someone who is unknown and unseen. "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen"^[7].

Moreover the communitarian dimension of our Christian vocation has been strongly emphasized by the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council. Every liturgical act is in itself an act of the whole Body of Christ, of the Head and of the members. Every sacrament and every Mass that is celebrated is an act of Christ and of his Body. Every good deed performed by a member benefits the whole membership, and every sin is not only an offense against God, but a wound inflicted on the Body of Christ.

In this perspective, our first communal act at the start of this Eucharistic celebration is a confession of our sins against God and the Body of Christ: "I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters"; and at the latter part of this communal penitential act we say "and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God".

It is quite clear from all this, that there is no such thing as a Christian for one's own self. We are Christians because we belong to Christ and to his Body. A Christian who has not learned to see and love Christ in his neighbor is not fully a Christian. A Christian cannot be like Cain who refused to be his brother's keeper. We are keepers of our brothers, we are bound to one another by the bond of love. This love is God's command for all those who believe in him.

For a Christian, to live is to love, and to love is to live. Magmahalan tayo tulad ng pagmahal sa atin nang Diyos. (Let us love one another as God has loved us !)

4. This communitarian or ecclesial nature of our Christian vocation which is more easily practised on the diocesan and parish levels, must, however, be directed towards the universal Church. *We are a local Church only to the extent that we are part of the universal Church* established by Christ our Lord. We are a legitimate part only because we belong to the whole. And our Lord intended

and actually established a Church that will extend from one end to the other of the world, to become the new People of God, the new Israel.

Christ our Lord wanted his Church to be universal and yet to be one and the same all over the world. He wanted all nations beyond boundaries and barriers to be one ecclesial community shepherded by one supreme Pastor. He wanted his Church or ecclesial community to preach the same doctrine, practise the same worship, observe the same law of love, and be shepherded by one holder of the keys, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This same Church is the fountain of truth and source of spiritual power that assimilates all cultures of all places and times. This assimilation does not result in the destruction of the human and local cultures but in their sublimation. Christian truth, in turn, is made incarnate in each local culture, purifying, elevating and solidifying its values.

The unity of doctrine and worship proclaimed and safeguarded from adulteration by the universal Church is perfectly complemented by the law of love that binds all Christians to God and to one another, all local Churches to the universal Church and to each other. Thus the universal Church, through the local Churches and under the impulse of the indwelling Spirit, gradually transforms the whole world into the kingdom of God here on earth and ceaselessly promotes a civilization of love.

5. Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus Christ wants us to live our faith for the building up of the ecclesial community, so that his redemption can be applied to the individual members through the ministry of the Church. At the same time we must never cease to emphasize that *each member must continuously be converted to God and conformed to Christ by love*, in order to share in this common task of building up the Body of Christ.

It may not be hard for one to remain faithful to the doctrine of faith as proposed by the universal Church and faithful to authentic worship ; we may even be able to speak in tongues, and interpret them and be gifted with prophecies. But if we fail to follow our Lord's command to love God and one another, we will not be counted worthy of his eternal reward. With clear deliberation our Lord summarized all the commandments of the Old Law into a command to love God and one another.

Doing no harm or injury to others is much less and truly short of loving others. In our community of Christians, Saint Paul's understanding of love is the true understanding of our Lord's command to love one another. " If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing"[8].

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, if my visit here would only make all of you love one another just a little bit more; if my visit here would make you just a little more ecclesial or community-oriented, so that you would think more and more of others with love ; if my visit here would make

you desire more to serve than to be served, then my visit, by God's grace, would be fruitful and worthwhile.

Finally, allow me, dearly beloved in our Lord, to recall and propose as our rule of life in our ecclesial relationship the unsurpassable prayer of the Seraphic Doctor, Saint Francis of Assisi : "Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring your love, where there is injury your pardon, Lord, and where there is doubt true faith in you. O Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul. Make me a channel of your peace. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, in giving to all men that we receive, and in dying that we are born to eternal life. Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is despair in life let me bring hope; where there is darkness only light, and where is sadness ever joy".

Maraming salamat at Pagpalain nawa kayo nang Diyos !

[1] *Mt 28:18-20.*

[2] *Jn 20:21.*

[3] *Mk 16:20.*

[4] *Acts 2:41-42.*

[5] Cf. *1 Cor 12:4-7.*

[6] *Jn 13:35.*

[7] *1 Jn 4:20.*

[8] *1 Cor 13:1-13.*

