



The Holy See

MASS FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PONTIFICAL PHILIPPINE COLLEGE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Saint Peter's Basilica
Sunday, 17 May 1987*

"Ring out your joy to the Lord...

Give thanks to the Lord..." (Cfr. *Ps.* 33 (32), 1).1. These words of the Responsorial Psalm express the spiritual joy we share as we gather to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is in such a spirit of praise and thanksgiving that you, members of the Filipino community, have gathered around this altar, to thank the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our own Father, for the *twenty-five years of the Pontifical Philippine College*. In doing so, you reaffirm the ecclesial bonds and spiritual communion which unite the beloved Filipino people to the Successor of Peter; and you acknowledge the importance for your people and for the Church in your land of the wise counsel which led the Philippine Hierarchy to establish in Rome an institution for the higher education of members of the clergy. 2. The Liturgy of this Fifth Sunday of Easter speaks to us above all of the wonderful mystery of our spiritual union with Christ, the *Risen Lord*, who – in the words of the Council – is the "goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 45). Jesus wants us to be close to him: "so that where I am you may be too" (Cfr. *Io.* 14,3). The question asked by Thomas—"How can we know the way?" expresses a spontaneous reaction to the presentation of the Christian view of life and reality. Indeed, it expresses the concern felt by every human being when awakened to a sense of responsibility for the life that God has given, when faced with the need to give direction to life's activities. It is a question which has accompanied the human family in one way or another throughout its history, and which today takes the form of an acute concern for the very future of civilization, a concern which expresses itself in the hearts and voices of many, especially the young, as a dramatic plea for justice, peace and truth in human affairs.

"How can we know the way?" (Cfr. *Ibid.* 14,5).

Not a way that will, in the end, prove to have been a false illusion,
promising what it could not give.

Not a way that leads to despair and death!

But the way that leads to truth and fullness of life!

3. And as we search, we hear the powerful words of Jesus,
in reply to Thomas and to each one of us:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Cfr. Ibid. 14,6).

At the Last Supper, before his death, Jesus Christ reveals to us the whole meaning of our existence. He reveals the way to the Father; he teaches us the truth about God's mercy and about our own transcendent destiny; he offers us the life about which Saint John says: "the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (Cfr. *Io.* 1,2).

Yes, *life!* Life for every individual and for every people!

The true life that was made manifest in the Son of God! Where sin and death had triumphed, the Paschal Mystery of redemption has brought new life. That new life is communicated to those who "come to him" (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 2,4), *those who come to Jesus Christ*. If we hear his voice and open our hearts to his gift of the Holy Spirit, he will give us the true life. In the words of the Second Reading, he who is "the living stone" of the "spiritual house" will transform us too into "living stones" (Cfr. *Ibid.* 2,5). Here today, within this magnificent Basilica, which the hands of artists have marvellously fashioned from stone, we, as the community of faith gathered around the altar of Sacrifice, "living stones", are called to be the true "spiritual house" of which the Lord is the "cornerstone" and in which are offered "the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God" (Cfr. *Ibid.* 2,6). 4. Since December 8 last, the Church in the Philippines has been celebrating a National Eucharistic Year to commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the International Eucharistic Congress held in Manila in 1937. This is therefore a special time of spiritual growth for every Filipino who is willing to make the Eucharist the focal point of his or her coming to maturity in Christ. The Eucharist demands and sustains the "conversion" of life which the Sacrament of Penance renews constantly in the heart of the Christian. The Eucharist builds and nourishes the communion of faith and life of all who celebrate the great mystery of the everlasting covenant (Cfr. *Prex Eucharistica* IV). The Eucharist fills the entire ecclesial community with vitality and energy. It is the nourishment of every form of the apostolate. The Eucharist speaks to us of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ. 5. The Second Reading of today's Liturgy reminds us appropriately, of the royal priesthood shared by all God's People: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praise of God" (*1 Petr.* 2,9). That description applies to every faithful community of the baptized. In a special way it refers to the early Christian community, whose history is narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. And precisely

from the Acts of the Apostles, in the First Reading of this Mass, we learn that in that first community, gathered around the Apostles, there very quickly arose a clear perception of *the diversity of offices and duties* (Cfr. *Act.* 6,3-4). The faithful know that the "laying on of hands" constitutes the visible sign of a vocation and consecration which sets one apart for a special ministry (Cfr. *Ibid.* 6,6). Ordained priests, "in the image of Christ the Eternal High Priest, are consecrated to preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful and celebrate divine worship" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*). Herein lies the special significance of the anniversary you have wished to commemorate on this occasion: twenty-five years of the commitment of the Pontifical Philippine College to the formation of priests for the building up of God's "spiritual house".

6. As sons and daughters of the Philippines you hold in high esteem the vocation to the priesthood and the religious life. The presence here of so many priests, and men and women Religious, is a visible sign of the vitality of the Church in your land. Dear priests and Religious: the more profound the crisis of spiritual values affecting contemporary society, the brighter your light should shine before your brothers and sisters, the more you must become men and women of prayer, the more you must be willing to give witness to the person, work and teaching of Christ, and the more you, personally, must be willing to "decrease in order that he may increase" (Cfr. *Io.* 3,30). The present hour requires that you be men and women of God. And you, dear lay men and women of the Philippines, you have a different but no less urgent role. It is your task to carry the Gospel of Jesus into the daily affairs of the family, work and society. No less than for the priests and Religious, Jesus is the "way, and the truth, and the life" for you too. I am happy that so many of you have been able to come here today. I pray that the fellowship which flows from the Eucharist and the joy of meeting one another may strengthen and sustain you all in the challenges which life places before you, especially when you are far from your homes and families, and in the tasks that Christ lays on your shoulders. Indeed, in Europe you are called *to be the new and youthful witness of that very Faith* which your country received from Europe so many generations ago. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the spiritual Mother whom Filipinos love so intensely, gather the entire Filipino people under her mantle of loving care and protection. May she intercede for all of you with her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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