



The Holy See

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(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO LANDOWNERS AND WORKERS OF SUGAR CANE PLANTATIONS**

*«Reclaimed area», Bacolod City
Friday, 20 February 1981*

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"[1]. With this blessing of the Apostle Paul I greet you all most cordially. It is a great joy for me to come to you today in this City of Bacolod to meet the people of Negros Occidental. My only regret is that my visit with you is so short, but many more communities in the Philippines have invited me, from the North to the South of these beautiful islands. Even if I can be with you only for a few hours, I want you to know that every encounter with the Filipino people is special to me because it is you, the people, young and old, who make it so. And therefore, I say from the bottom of my heart : thank you for coming together here this afternoon, thank you for making me feel at home in Bacolod.

Madamo guid nga salamat ! (Thank you very much!).

I come in the name of the Lord Jesus and as his servant. I come as the Bishop of Rome, the Vicar of Christ and your brother in the faith. I come as a friend of all the people, and especially of the young people who are so numerous here and whose smiling faces and wonderful dances give me such deep joy.

My fraternal greetings go in the first place to your pastor, Bishop Antonio Yapsutco Fortich, who kindly invited me to this island, and to the other Bishops and priests present. In the priests,

diocesan and religious, in the religious Sisters, I greet the successors of the first missionaries who, more than four hundred years ago, established flourishing Christian communities on these shores. I greet in them the tireless workers for the faith, who keep alive among the people the message of the Gospel in unselfish service and generous dedication, collaborating with the Bishop, in a spirit of unity and in "the obedience of faith"[2].

2. In particular, however, my heartfelt greetings go to you, my brothers and sisters of the Catholic laity in Bacolod, to *you who are such a great sector of the one People of God, reborn in Christ and united by his Holy Spirit.*

Because you believe in Christ and have been regenerated in the Sacrament of Baptism you are children of God. Because you believe in Christ, you are able to approach him in the Sacrament of Penance and to receive his love in the Holy Eucharist. I know how much you esteem the Sacraments, and I want to encourage you to remain ever faithful to them. They are your source of life and hope, and they will give you strength to remain true to your calling as Christians, real Christians. And, when they look at you, people should be able to say : "See how much they love each other".

Love each other, my brothers and sisters, love each other in Jesus Christ, for in doing so *you will be true witnesses of Jesus, of his immense love for every human being.* Jesus needs you, dear faithful people of the Church in Bacolod. Jesus needs you, because his love will not reach the world without the witness of your Christian lives. Jesus cannot be fully present in your cities and villages, in your families and schools, in your workshops or in the fields where you toil, unless you, the lay people, bring him there, manifest him there by what you say and do, make him visible in your love for each other.

3. The message which I bring to you today is a *message of love*, the same message which the Church has brought to people all over the world in ages past and which she will never cease to proclaim to future generations. It is the same message that you, the Church in Bacolod, must bring to all the people of this island.

It is in the name of Christ, and because she must preach his message of love to the whole world, that *the Church speaks out on behalf of the dignity of man*, created in the image of God[3] and redeemed by Jesus Christ. Because she believes in the God-given dignity of every human person, the Church sees it as her mission to embrace in her solicitude man in his totality : man whose definitive destiny is God, man who must live, in the concrete reality of his daily life, according to the dignity that is his.

For these reasons, the Church desires to bring the message of salvation, which Christ has entrusted to her, to every human being, to every culture and social environment, to the whole of mankind, but in the first place to those who are most in need. Without abandoning her specific task

of evangelization, she will also strive to ensure that all aspects of the life of man and of the *society of which he is part should be imbued with respect for human dignity and therefore with justice.*

To you people of Bacolod, and through you to all the people of the Philippines, who are sons and daughters of a nation engaged in the search for a better life for all its citizens, I repeat what I said once before : that "the world willed by God is a world of justice. That this order must be continually realized in the world, and even that it must always be realized anew, as situations and social systems grow and develop, in proportion to new conditions and economic possibilities, new possibilities and necessities of distributing goods"[4]. The dignity of man and the common good of society demand that society be based on justice.

4. There are in today's world too many situations of injustice. Injustice reigns when some nations accumulate riches and live in abundance while other nations cannot offer the majority of people the basic necessities. Injustice reigns when within the same society some groups hold most of the wealth and power while large strata of the population cannot decently provide for the livelihood of their families even through long hours of backbreaking labor in factories or in the fields.

Injustice reigns when the laws of economic growth and ever greater profit determine social relations, leaving in poverty and destitution those that have only the work of their hands to offer. Being aware of such situations, the Church will not hesitate to take up the cause of the poor and to become the voice of those who are not listened to when they speak up, not to demand charity, but to ask for justice.

Yes, the preference for the poor is a Christian preference! It is a preference that expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of salvation to the poor, for the poor are indeed loved by God, and God it is who guarantees their rights. The Church proclaims her preference for the poor within the totality of her mission of evangelization that is directed to all people so that all may come to know Christ and find in the love of God and of neighbor their highest fulfillment.

The Church wants to be of service to all people, in whatever social condition they may be; she wants to be close to all human beings, since all are poor and in need of salvation and all ought to be "poor in spirit". But she shows a special solidarity with those that are suffering and in need, with those that weep and are humiliated, with those that have been left at the margin of society and of life; she does this so that they may be helped to become aware of their dignity as human beings and as children of God.

No area of her pastoral mission will be omitted in her concern for the poor: she will preach to them the Gospel, she will invite them to the sacramental life of the Church and to prayer, she will speak to them about sacrifice and resurrection, she will include them in her social apostolate.

5. I have been told that many of you here present are connected with the agricultural sector, and more specifically with the sugar cane cultivation, either as landowners, planters or laborers. You all live close to the land and the land provides your livelihood. To all of you I would address some special words in order to apply to you and your particular situation the social message of the Church.

You love the land, you cherish the fertile plains. You belong to this land and this land belongs to you. I myself have always been close to nature and I understand your attachment to your rural setting. During my pastoral visits to other parts of the globe, I have insisted on meeting every time the people who live from the land : at Cuilapan and Oaxaca in Mexico, at Nowy Targ in my native Poland, at Des Moines in the United States of America, at Kisangani in Zaire, at Recife and Teresina in Brasil. To all of them I have repeated the same message : *that the land is a gift of God to all humanity*, a gift entrusted to man by the Creator, a gift of divine love.

In his gratuitous love, God did not only create man and woman, but he gave them the earth so that human life could be sustained through their efforts. From the beginning, and for the benefit of all, God has willed the interaction of land and labor so that the full dignity of man may always be protected and promoted.

6. Yes, human dignity must be promoted by the land. Because the land is a gift of God for the benefit of all, it is not admissible to use this gift in such a manner that the benefits it produces serve only a limited number of people, while the others—the vast majority—are excluded from the benefits which the land yields. It is not admissible that in the general development process of a nation there should continue to exist the injustice whereby progress worthy of man does not reach precisely those people who live in the rural areas, who in sweat and toil make the land productive, and who must rely on the work of their hands for the sustenance of their family.

It is not admissible that people who work the land must continue to live in a situation that offers them no hope for a better future. No, in giving the land to humanity, God had a different purpose, for his gift was a gift of love to humanity.

A truly Christian challenge is therefore presented to *those that own or control the land*. I know that many of you who are plantation-owners or who are planters are truly concerned with the welfare of your workers, but the Church, aware of her responsibilities, feels impelled to hold up before you again and again the ideal of love and justice, and to encourage you to compare constantly your actions and attitudes with the ethical principles regarding the priority of the common good and regarding the social purpose of economic activity.

The right of ownership is legitimate in itself but it cannot be separated from its wider social dimension. In his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI, echoing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, stated this principle very clearly when he wrote : "God intended the earth and all it

contains for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all people follow justice and unite in charity, created goods should abound for them on a reasonable basis[5]. All other rights whatsoever, including those of property and of free commerce, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should not hinder but on the contrary favor its application. It is a grave and urgent social duty to redirect them to their primary finality"[6].

The landowners and the planters should therefore not let themselves be guided in the first place by the economic laws of growth and gain, nor by the demands of competition or the selfish accumulation of goods, but by the demands of justice and by the moral imperative of contributing to a decent standard of living and to working conditions which make it possible for the workers and for the rural society to live a life that is truly human and to see all their fundamental rights respected.

7. Likewise *the workers*, either *duma-ans*, *sacadas* or industrial workers, must be guided by a truly human and Christian concept of their task. Human labor remains the superior element in the economic enterprise, for through it man exerts his dominion over the material world for the building up of his own human dignity[7].

The man or the woman who works becomes a cooperator of God. Made to the image of God, man received the mission of governing the universe so that its riches can be developed and used for the benefit of all, in order to grant every human person the possibility to live according to his or her own dignity and thus give glory to God.

To all the sugar cane workers I say, as I say to all workers everywhere : never forget the great dignity that God has granted you, never let your work degrade you but remember always the mission that God has entrusted to you : to be, by the work of your hands, his collaborators in the continuation of the work of creation. See in your work a labor of love, for your daily work expresses love for your dear ones and your commitment to the well-being of your family. Be proud to be workers of the land.

At the same time, know that the Church supports you in your endeavors to have your rights as workers respected. Ninety years ago already, the great social Encyclical [Rerum Novarum](#) spelled out very clearly that the worker is entitled to wages that give him a just share in the wealth he helps to produce, and that working conditions should be geared not to the ever increasing economic profit of the enterprise but to the inviolable dignity of man as an individual, as a provider for his family and as a builder of the society to which he belongs.

It has been the constant teaching of the Church that workers have a right to unite in free associations for the purpose of defending their interest and contributing as responsible partners to the common good. Such associations should be protected by appropriate laws which, rather than restrict their activities, should guarantee the free pursuit of the social welfare of all their members

and of the workers in general.

8. Wherever people work together, inspired by the aim of securing the dignity of every human being and of building a society based on justice, the hope for a better future will be kept alive, and ways and means will be found to share the fruits of progress with all in the community. When the legitimate rights of every category are respected, peaceful ways will be devised to achieve the common good and no one will hesitate to put the full wealth of his talents, skills and influence at the service of his brothers and sisters in the common pursuit of a just society.

Government agencies that are guided by a true concern for the dignity of the human person will not become instruments of oppression or power tools for one class or category. *Free associations of workers* that base their action on the peerless dignity of man will inspire confidence as partners in the search for just solutions.

Workers and employers who learn to see each other as brothers will not get locked in bitter disputes that leave the problems unsolved and human solidarity weakened or in ruins. When man himself, man with his unsurpassed dignity, is the measure that is applied to the social problems, then there will be no room for violence in the struggle for justice. To adopt man as the criterion of all social activity means committing oneself to the transformation of every unjust situation without destroying what one seeks to protect : a society based on brotherhood, justice and love.

Violence can never be a means for solving social conflict, and class struggle which opposes one group to another cannot create justice since its premise is destruction and contempt for man. To construct a truly human society in the Philippines, every man and woman must make a choice for justice and love, for solidarity and brotherhood against selfishness and hatred. Choose human dignity and a better future will be yours !

9. My dear friends of Bacolod, of Negros Occidental, and all of you who have come from far away to be with me today, I know that you are not lacking in generosity and courage. In your communities, in the cities and in the villages, you keep alive a, marvelous heritage of values and qualities that is your strength for the future.

Remain true to what you are : preserve always your joy, your love of the family, your solidarity within each community, and above all your determination to share whatever you are and whatever you have—even if it be little or humble—with those of your brothers and sisters who are in need. In doing so, your community will be graced by the mark of humanity !

To all my brothers and sisters in Christ I say : keep alive in your hearts your confidence in God, your faithfulness to the Church and your devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The moment has now come for me to take leave of you. I would have liked to stay longer with you

but others are waiting to celebrate with me in the bond of love that unites us in Jesus Christ. Thank you for your presence here and for the sharing of this hour. I feel so much richer for having met you and for having seen your pride as Filipinos and as Christians.

When you return to your villages and your families, take with you the blessing of the Pope. And tell all those that could not be here today, tell you old people and your sick, that the Pope loves them and carries them always in his heart and his prayers. I bless you all in the name of Jesus Christ, our merciful and loving Savior.

Kabay pa nga bendisyonan kamo sang Dios ! (May God bless you, as you go with my love and care !).

[1] *Phil* 1:2.

[2] *Rom* 1:5.

[3] Cf. *Gen* 1:26.

[4] Discourse at Saint-Denis, France, 31 May 1980, No. 5.

[5] *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

[6] No. 22.

[7] Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 67.

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