



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 17 October 1985

My dear Cardinal Sin and brother Bishops,

I greet you, Pastors of the region of Luzon, with warm sentiments of fraternal esteem, which I express in the words of Saint Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rom. 1, 7*).

During these days of your ad Limina visits you have represented the reality of your local Churches before the tomb of Saint Peter, the "rock" on which our Lord Jesus built his Church as the sacrament of salvation for all nations until he comes again. In this way the organic and stable unity of the local Churches with the universal Church is made manifest in a particularly eloquent and vital way.

I pray that you will return to your dioceses strengthened by the experience of the universal communion which is the Church, and that you will share that universal vision with your priests, men and women religious, and with the faithful, your brothers and sisters in discipleship. For although each of you has particular responsibility for that portion of God's people entrusted to his daily care, all of you, together with your brother Bishops throughout the world, form a unique fraternity in which the burdens of one are the burdens of all in a communion of love and pastoral concern for the whole Church of God.

1. The entire Church will shortly celebrate the Extraordinary Synod which marks the Twentieth Anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. I have called this Synod with the intention of reawakening the authentic sense of the spiritual and pastoral achievements of that precious moment of ecclesial life. Recently, to the pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square I said

that “such an initiative has the purpose of stimulating all of the members of the People of God to an ever-deepening awareness of the Council’s teachings and to an ever more faithful application of the principles and directives which have issued from that impressive Assembly” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio ad precationem “Angelus” habita*, die 29 sept. 1985: vide *supra*, pp. 802 s.).

There is hardly any aspect of the Church’s life which the Council has not touched and for which it did not offer doctrinal and pastoral motivations capable of producing a new upsurge of holiness and vitality in the life of the whole body of the Church’s membership. It is extremely important that we all share the conviction that the Council represented an extraordinary moment of the working of the grace of God in the Church, and that moment was decisive for the reality and form of the Church’s presence in the world today and in the future.

It is true that not all the potential life-giving energies which the Council fostered have come to fruition for the unambiguous benefit of the Church and the world. But precisely because the Council was “a kind of milestone . . . in the almost two thousand year history of the Church and . . . in the religious and cultural history of the world” (*Ibid.*), we “vicars and ambassadors of Christ”? (*Lumen Gentium*, 27), must not cease to reflect on its content, nor fail to realize our grave responsibility before Christ, before the Church and the world, for its full and faithful implementation.

Together with you, I give thanks to our heavenly Father for the benefits which the Church in the Philippines has reaped from the teachings of the Council and from the pastoral insights and impulses which, as a consequence, the Holy Spirit - who “vivifies ecclesiastical institutions as a kind of soul” (*Ad Gentes*, 4) - has brought forth among your people.

2. In this respect I recall that one of the great lines of ecclesial renewal which emerged from the Council has been the better *definition of the role of the laity* in the Church’s life and mission. In union with their Pastors the laity are truly responsible in their own right for the Church’s ministry of salvation: each one “according to the grace received” (*1 Petr.* 4, 10).

The Bishops of the Philippines gratefully recognize that much progress has been made in this area. The faithful are, generally speaking, more aware of their specific role within the community of faith, and they assume the various services and ministries proper to them with joy and generous dedication.

You and your priests realize too that this is not a mere organizational and functional necessity. Rather, as a result of their baptismal configuration with Christ the laity have - in the words of the Code of Canon Law - “*the duty and the right to work so that the divine message of salvation may increasingly reach the whole of humankind in every age and in every land*” (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 211).

There is a freshness and vigor in the Christian lives of many of your faithful, *as a result of a more widespread “discovery” of the word of God in the Bible*. Much more perhaps than before, individuals and groups find in the Scriptures the nourishment for their prayer and a support for their daily endeavors to live in holiness and justice before God and their neighbors.

The appearance too of “basic Christian communities” in your local Churches has, in many cases and notwithstanding certain deficiencies, given support to a greater sense of spiritual communion and human solidarity. As Pastors you rejoice in these factors of renewal, and you hope that these and other positive aspects of the life of the Church in the Philippines will contribute to the consolidation of a truly Christian culture capable of imbuing the life of the nation with evangelical principles of conduct and public policy.

At the same time you are called to make every effort to offset the danger of fragmentation which a too personal interpretation of the revealed word, or an excessive concern with specific local problems seen in the light of ideologies not inspired by the Gospel might cause in your local Churches. As successors of the Apostles in the College of Bishops, we have a fundamental obligation to defend and strengthen *the unity of the one Church of Christ*. That unity cannot be achieved at any level except through the bonds of professed faith, of the sacraments, of pastoral government, and of communion. Christ’s prayer “that they may be one” (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 14) is applicable indeed to the universal Church. It is also Christ’s will for the particular realization of that Church which is the diocese, and, in their own way, the parish and other local and regional groupings which constitute the richness of the Church’s presence in each place.

3. In some of the statements and Pastoral Letters which you, the Bishops of the Philippines, have issued on aspects of the present situation of your country, you have not failed to draw attention to the *serious crisis of moral values* affecting some sectors of the population.

Certainly, you do not overlook the reality and depth of goodness which characterizes today - as regards living conditions, health services, educational programs, employment and working conditions, your people, and which is clearly manifested in their love of justice, their respect for the dignity and rights of others, their attachment to truth, and their sense of brotherhood and solidarity, especially towards the poor and the needy.

Yet as Pastors you are troubled by a certain breakdown in public and private morality. This is undoubtedly a subject about which you reflect and pray.

In this context I would refer to one area of concern. At the fundamental cell of society and of the Church, *the family* is particularly affected by the economic, social and moral conditions of society. A major challenge facing the Church, and indeed humanity as a whole, is that of defending the family against those forces which increasingly undermine its stability and effectiveness in serving life and love.

In your country you are engaged in clarifying the doctrinal and pastoral lines of the Church's service to marriage and family life. What the Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio" states in general has particular significance in the circumstances of the Philippines: "At a moment of history in which the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way deform it . . . the Church perceives in a more urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming the plan of God for marriage and the family, ensuring their full vitality and human and Christian development" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 3).

Society as a whole, and therefore Christians singly and collectively as responsible citizens of their country, and more so if they hold public office, has a grave duty to work for the solution of the many ills that beset the family and assistance to the poor and the poorest. In this matter the Church as a community of faith has a specific role. Her task is to "evangelize" marriage and family life, to proclaim God's plan and to help the faithful to share in the mystery of God's love through the love which is the heart of married and family life.

In relation to marriage the Code of Canon Law underlines the need for young couples to be properly prepared for receiving this Sacrament, and the need for a fruitful liturgical celebration of the marriage itself (Cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici, cann. 1063-1064*). An abundant literature and many programs of formation for priests and catechists show that this is indeed a pastoral priority among you.

Forces which in the past have worked against the *stability of family life* are compounded today by factors such as the high rate of unemployment, especially among the young, and by the fact that thousands of Filipinos are obliged to seek work abroad. Your people are also experiencing the influence of a culture that is marked by exaggerated individualism and a consumer mentality which leads to a practical materialism impatient of religious and ethical values. In fact, one of the matters frequently mentioned during these *ad Limina* visits has been the widespread and growing *religious ignorance* which in turn leads to indifferentism and a weakening of moral response.

By defending the values of marriage and family life you are safeguarding *the cultural identity of the Filipino people*, which is particularly marked by the special love shown to children and by the place and role of women in private and public life. Unfortunately the traditional dignity of women is often contradicted today by forms of exploitation which, as well as degrading their victims, threaten the very fabric of social life, by their pervading accessibility.

As "Mater et Magistra", Mother and Teacher of the faithful, the Church in the Philippines faces these problems with a sense of urgency and with a conviction that your people are hungry for the word of God and for the united voice of their Pastors. Perhaps without realizing it, in their hearts your people repeat the words of Peter before Christ: "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (*Jo. 6, 68*). For this reason I have keen interest in your "Bible for every Family" project.

In your parishes and educational institutions, in programs of adult education, in Movements of spiritual and apostolic life, in the “basic Christian communities” which have a clear ecclesial identity, you have the framework of a dynamic and effective presentation of Christ’s message. Among the priests, religious and laity you find excellent collaborators in the task of evangelization and catechesis, in which the Christian view of marriage is an essential element.

I can only encourage you in your endeavors to enlighten the consciences of the faithful and of the leaders of the nation to the dangers inherent in certain trends. In this respect you spoke eloquently about *respect for life* in your 1984 Pastoral Letter on this theme.

4. Two final considerations are close to my heart. The first is my desire to express my appreciation of the spirit of openness and generous hospitality with which you have welcomed large numbers of *refugees from South East Asia*. As the principal Catholic nation in Asia, you have not failed to give a clear example of human and evangelical love towards these brothers and sisters who bear in their bodies the testimony of much suffering and pain, who are the victims of a human tragedy beyond telling. In this you have again shown your sense of brotherhood with the great peoples of the Asian continent.

Nor can I forget the magnificent contribution given to the evangelization of Asia by *Radio Veritas Overseas Service*. By broadcasting the Christian Gospel in various languages, it reaches peoples and cultures hungry for this message and becomes a stimulus of authentic human values and an instrument of salvation in Christ our Lord.

I understand that difficulties of all kinds are not lacking, and I am grateful to all those who, according to the responsibility of each one, support the valid and effective utilization of this means of evangelization. They can be sure of my personal appreciation and of the gratitude of those who in the intimacy of their homes are enabled to receive the light of the Gospel. This is particularly so where *Radio Veritas* is the only voice of the Church which they may hear.

5. My brother Bishops, I assure you that all of your pastoral concerns are reflected in my prayer and in the intentions of the apostolic ministry which the Lord, for his own purposes, has entrusted to me.

My great wish is to stand by you and confirm you as *living witnesses of Jesus Christ*. The Council reminds us: “In the Bishops . . . our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of all those who believe” (*Lumen Gentium*, 21). May he who is our strength sustain you in this sublime but difficult mission. And may Mary, Mother of the Church, be with you as you continue the redemptive work of her Son!

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