



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PHILIPPINE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 10 February 1997

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. In the love of our Saviour Jesus Christ, I welcome you, *the third group of Philippine Bishops in this series of "ad limina" visits by your Conference*. I take the occasion of Cardinal Sin's presence to recall once more with a profound sense of gratitude the extraordinary events of January 1995. The magnificent response of so many young people at the [World Youth Day](#) and the joy of commemorating the fourth centenary of the Archdiocese of Manila, and the then-suffragan sees of Cebu, Caceres and Nueva Segovia constitute a cherished moment of my own pilgrim ministry. Those wonderful days spent in Manila confirmed my hopes for the spreading of the light of the Gospel in the next millennium in the continent of Asia.

Through the intercession of the Apostles Peter and Paul, whose witness sanctified this see of Rome, I pray that the Catholic community of the Philippines will always be fully conscious of the important "missionary vocation" which the Lord has placed before you and for which the Holy Spirit has been preparing you since the first evangelization of your islands. This vocation confers on you a great responsibility and a special dignity. It makes practical demands on your own episcopal ministry, including a generous application of the provisions of the *Norms* which the Congregation for the Clergy has issued on co-operation between particular Churches and the better distribution of clergy (cf. *Postquam Apostoli* [25 March 1980]: AAS 72 [1980], 343-364; [Redemptoris missio](#), n. 64).

2. As I already mentioned in my other meetings with the members of your Conference, the

challenges facing the Church in the Philippines are truly enormous. They call you to absolute trust in the Lord and demand *a systematic catechesis at every level of the Church's life*. Guided by your "sound teaching" (2 Tm 4:3), Filipino Catholics must be able to apply the "word of faith" (Rom 10:8) to the real-life situations in which they live out the universal call to holiness. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, I urged Bishops to foster in their Dioceses "a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a pertinent and effective organization, putting into operation the necessary personnel, means and equipment, and also financial resources" (n. 63). I renew that appeal, especially with regard to *two crucial and intimately related areas of pastoral life: the family and the promotion of social justice*.

3. Indeed, the defense and promotion of the family, the heart of every society, is a pre-eminent task facing all those committed to the pursuit of social well-being and justice. Throughout my Pontificate I have striven to explain that "through the family passes the primary current of the civilization of love, which finds therein its 'social foundations'" (*Letter to Families*, n. 15). It falls in the first place to you, the Bishops, to form the consciences of the faithful in accordance with the Church's teachings, so that the laity in particular may work effectively for the introduction of public policies which strengthen family life. Your Conference has spoken out frequently on this theme, recalling that a *family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies*. In this sense the State, which by its nature is ordered to the common good, is bound to defend the family, respecting its natural structure and inalienable rights. The lay faithful, especially through family organizations and associations, are to be encouraged to continue to promote social institutions, civil legislation and national policies which support family rights and responsibilities (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, n. 44).

The economy likewise has a vital part to play in ensuring the strength of the family. One of the main criticisms which the Church's Pastors have to make regarding the prevailing socioeconomic system, understood as the subordination of almost all other values to market forces, is that the family dimension of the *work contract* is generally ignored. Such a system makes little or no provision for the *family wage*. How far are most societies from what the Church urges: "Just remuneration for the work of an adult who is responsible for a family means remuneration which will suffice for establishing and properly maintaining a family and for providing security for its future" (*Laborem exercens*, n. 19)! Legislators, leaders of business, industry and labour, educators and those working in the mass media, and families themselves, must all be encouraged to *re-create a family-centred economy, based on principles of subsidiarity and solidarity*. True social justice passes by way of the family! It is also with this in mind that I will be present at the celebration of the *International Day of the Family in Rio de Janeiro* next October.

4. In the Philippines, as in many parts of the world, the family is like a window on a society suffering the tensions of transition from a more traditional way of life to one characterized by increasing individualism and fragmentation. In this transition, the moral and religious truths which should give support and direction to individuals and society are often forgotten or rejected, to the

point that certain kinds of behaviour which used to be considered as altogether wrong are becoming accepted both socially and legally, and even promoted as “rights”. Here, the most effective antidote will be the efforts of competent pastoral agents, working with perseverance and initiative through catechesis, family support groups and through the media of social communication. When the truth and meaning of human sexuality is undermined by a secularized mentality, the Church must increasingly teach and uphold God’s wise and loving plan for conjugal love. When “social life ventures on to the shifting sands of complete relativism” (*Evangeliium vitae*, n. 20), the moral and spiritual care of the family is *a challenge which cannot be ignored: it practically defines the Church’s pastoral mission*. In the year which commemorates the centenary of the birth of my venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, I wish to repeat his pressing invitation to every Bishop: “Work ardently and incessantly for the safeguarding and the holiness of marriage, so that it may always be lived in its entire human and Christian fullness. Consider this mission as one of your most urgent responsibilities at the present time” (cf. *Humanae vitae*, n. 30).

5. It is to the majority of the faithful who struggle each day to live up to the demands of their Christian dignity in marriage and the family that pastoral efforts are principally directed. The present-day tendency to look at difficult cases and special categories should not deflect the pastors of the Church from giving due attention to the needs of normal families. They look to their spiritual guides for the support of *sound doctrine, the grace of the sacraments and the human empathy* which will sustain them in the never easy mission of being a true “domestic church”, the first community to be evangelized, so that it in turn can be the proximate and immediate evangelizer of its members. Young couples preparing for marriage need to be helped to understand that marriage and the family rest on responsibilities freely assumed before God, before one’s partner, before the children involved, before society and before the Church. The bonds forged between those who become “one flesh” (Gn 2:24) demand life-long communion and fidelity. Fortunately, in your Dioceses you can count on many groups and associations which help the family to live its vocation as a community of love, a school of humanity and a sanctuary of life. Your Bishops’ Commission on Family Life likewise is untiring in its efforts to lead and co-ordinate pastoral efforts in this field.

Dear Brothers, our prophetic mission as heralds of “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:14) demands that we proclaim vigorously and persuasively the Church’s teaching on *the responsible transmission of human life*. This requires a concerted effort to help the faithful to understand more clearly that conjugal fulfilment is linked to respect for the intrinsic meaning and purpose of human sexuality. I warmly encourage you to continue the initiatives already undertaken *to improve marriage preparation and to support the teaching of the natural methods of regulating fertility*. The cultural and religious traditions of your people, who treasure life and freedom, should help them to oppose measures directed against life: abortion, sterilization and contraception. The Church preaches the *Gospel of life*, a fully positive view of human existence, contrary to the pessimism and selfishness of those who plot against the splendour of human sexuality and human life (cf. *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, Conciliar Document, n. 585).

6. A deeper evangelization of the People of God requires that you shed the penetrating light of the Gospel on every situation and circumstance which hinders the growth of Christ's kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace (cf. *Preface of Christ the King*). We are all aware of the difficulties involved in the *proclamation of social justice*, most especially when the questions involved are deeply imbedded in long-standing social structures and cultural mores. The preferential option for the poor is often misinterpreted, giving rise sometimes to tensions between the Church and certain sectors of society which require constructive dialogue in the interests of the common good. You show yourselves to be Shepherds after the Lord's own heart (cf. Jer 3:15) when you lend your intelligence, pastoral skills and creativity to the promotion of a vision of man — every single human being — which fully corresponds to human dignity as revealed by Christ.

Your commitment to social teaching is no mere humanitarian concern: *hunger and thirst for justice must be constantly nourished by prayer and liturgical worship*. Through union with Christ, the baptized are transformed by grace for the service of charity; at the altar they receive the strength to persevere in the service of justice (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 48). The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines rightly drew attention to the close *connection between the life of faith and the work of justice*: "The social apostolate is to be constantly given solid religious grounding through catechesis and organic linking with worship" (*Decrees*, article 20, §3). I encourage you therefore to continue, with wisdom and courage, to guide and enlighten the faithful, and indeed the whole of society, regarding the moral and ethical foundations of a just and humane coexistence.

7. Dear Brothers in the Lord: in the Upper Room the Lord Jesus invited his disciples to be his friends, to persevere in loving communion with him (cf. Jn 15:13-14), and he sealed this intimacy with the gift of the Eucharist. You are now celebrating a *Eucharistic Year*, which you inaugurated with the Fifth National Eucharistic Congress on the theme of *Eucharist and Freedom*. The same Eucharistic Lord accompanies you, the Successors of the Apostles, in your daily ministry. Thinking of your daily toil for the Gospel, I exhort you in the words of St Ignatius of Antioch: "Bear with all, just as the Lord does with you. Have patience with all charity, as indeed you do. To prayer give yourself unceasingly; beg for an increase in understanding; watch without letting your spirit flag" (*Letter to Polycarp*, 1:2). In this spirit I join you in commending our Brother Bishop Benjamin de Jesus, Vicar Apostolic of Jolo, to our heavenly Father's eternal love. Together with you I invoke God's peace upon the entire southern region of your country. I pray that as the Church in the Philippines prepares for the third millennium the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, will obtain for you and the priests, religious and lay faithful a share in her unfaltering faith, constant hope and fervent love. With my Apostolic Blessing.

