



The Holy See

MASS FOR THE PHILIPPINE COMMUNITY
GATHERED AT THE BASILICA OF ST PUDENZIANA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II
READ BY CARD. CAMILLO RUINI

Second Sunday of Lent
24 February 2002

"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!"

1. With the Apostle Peter, I also say, *"It is good for us to be here"* (Mt 17,4), gathered as they were then around the Lord Jesus. His face shines with a light that comes into this ancient Basilica of St Pudenciana. While we continue our Lenten pilgrimage towards Easter, we feel ourselves wrapped in a shining cloud. From the heights of heaven the Father says to us: *"Listen to Jesus"*. However, like Peter, James and John, we are sometimes afraid. We prefer other voices, earthly voices, because it is easier to listen to them and they seem to make more sense. But *only Jesus can lead us to life*. His alone is the word of eternal life. With grateful soul we accept his invitation: Do not be afraid! Listen to my voice!

2. With great joy I greet those who are involved in the pastoral care of Filipino Catholics here in Rome, better known as *"Sentro Pilipino"* that coordinates 38 pastoral centres spread throughout the city, to take care of the spiritual, moral and social needs of thousands of Filipino immigrants. I also warmly greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar for the Diocese of Rome, and Cardinal José Sanchez, Prefect emeritus of the Congregation for the Clergy. I also greet the Auxiliary Bishop Luigi Moretti and the Philippine Ambassadors to the Holy See and to Italy. I thank your spiritual guide, Fr Remo Bati, and those who help him with the pastoral care. I also greet Mons. Gino Amicarelli, the rector of the Basilica, the faithful present for this Eucharistic Liturgy, those involved in the work of the International Catholic Association for the service of young people, the Daughters of the Oratory and Oblates of the Child Jesus, who celebrate the 330th year of the foundation of

their Congregation.

I warmly greet all the Filipinos who live in Rome, Italy, and in every part of the world. Dear brothers and sisters, I know well how attached you are to your traditions and how you keep your faith alive with the regular practice of your religion. I thank the Lord for this and I encourage you always to walk on the path of full fidelity to Christ.

3. And here this morning *Jesus speaks to us of blessing*. He points forward to the supreme blessing of Easter and he looks back to the blessing promised to Abraham and his descendants.

In the first reading from the Book of Genesis, God promised Abraham two things which seemed impossible: a son and a land. Abraham was a rich man, but without the Lord's promise, he was a man whose life would simply end in death. In blessing Abraham with a son and a land, *God offers him a life that is greater than death*. God assures "our father in faith" that the last word will belong not to death but to life. This promise finds its ultimate fulfilment at Easter, when Christ is raised from the dead. It is not enough that Sarah's barren womb should give birth to Isaac, for death will still hold sway. *The promise to Abraham is fulfilled only when death itself is destroyed*; and death is destroyed when Christ is raised to new life.

4. We must remember too that the promise was made not just to Abraham, but *to his descendants as well: that is, to us!* During Lent, therefore, we bring to God all that is barren and dead in ourselves, all our sorrows and our sins, trusting that God who gave Sarah a son and who raised Jesus from the dead will turn all that is barren and dead in our lives into new and wonderful life. But this means that *we must leave behind much that is familiar*.

"Leave your country, your family and your father's house!" God says to Abraham. Many of you have done just that: you have left home and family, so that in your own way you may become a blessing for those you love back in the Philippines, contributing to their economic support, providing greater opportunities culturally and socially for your children and families. The separation is difficult and the cost is high, but it is a price that you are willing to pay in a difficult and often unjust world.

Because we live in a sinful world, Lent itself must become a kind of separation. We are called to leave behind our old ways of sin, which make our lives sterile and condemn us to spiritual death. Yet these sinful ways are often so deeply rooted in our lives that it is painful to leave them behind and set out for the land of blessing which God promises. *This repentance is difficult; but it is the price that must be paid* if we are to receive the blessing which the Father promises to those who listen to the voice of Jesus.

We bring to God all that is dead in our world: war, violence, disease, poverty, famine
Remember too God's promise that "all the families of the earth will be blessed" in Abraham. *The*

blessing of life will embrace the whole world. Therefore, in these days of Lent and in these troubled times, we bring to God all that is barren and dead in the world. *We bring the curse of war, violence, disease, famine, poverty and injustice to the God of all blessing.* We beg him to touch these evils and to turn them to life.

5. Listening to Jesus, we make ourselves available for what St Paul calls "the power of God that saved us". This power makes us able to meet him. We can then give witness to him with our lives, in the force of the grace that transforms us interiorly. We will become as resplendent as the sun "not in virtue of our works, but in virtue of his own purpose and his grace", as the Apostle writes to Timothy (2 Tm 1,9).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, here is the meaning of Lent: our lives, renewed through prayer, penance and charity, are opened to hear God and to the power of his mercy. Thus at Easter we will be able to come down from the holy mountain and put to flight the darkness of the world with the splendid light that shines on the face of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4,6).

This is the promise of the Lord! May he who began the good work in us bring it to completion (cf. Phil 1,6). May the Virgin Mary, the Woman of docile listening and the model of daily holiness obtain it for us.

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