



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PHILIPPINES  
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

*Tuesday, 18 September 1990*

*Your Eminence,*

*Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. I am happy that your visit to Rome gives us the occasion to meet in the spirit of ecclesial unity and love which must always be a characteristic of those who have been called to shepherd the Lord's Church, taking the place of the Apostles (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 20). As *pastors of the Church in the Philippines*, your presence is a sign of the apostolic faith which lives in the hearts of that portion of God's beloved people which has been entrusted to your ministry. In you I greet the priests, religious and laity of your Dioceses, commending them to the prayerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary whose protection Filipinos have always invoked in the dramatic as well as the ordinary circumstances of their earthly pilgrimage.

On this occasion I would refer you to the words I spoke to a previous group of Bishops from your country on their *ad Limina* visit in April of this year. I was concerned to point out that in the specific circumstances of Filipino society, faced with many serious economic, political and social problems, you, the Bishops, have a special charge to draw attention to the moral and religious dimensions of the questions which concern the well-being of your people. It is your task to preach the word of God in all its purity and power. You are witnesses of Jesus Christ and of the truths and values of his kingdom. Yours therefore is *an eminently spiritual and moral leadership* which aims above all at educating and challenging the consciences of your fellow-citizens to responsibility before God and before their brothers and sisters. Without a conversion of conscience to the commandments of God and the truths of the Beatitudes there can be no progress in the ways of justice, peace and human development. And in particular there can be no true Christian holiness of life and selfless service of others.

2. An enlightened and *committed living of the faith by the Filipino laity* is all the more urgent when standards and values that are essential to Christian living are being undermined by the practical materialism sweeping society. The family in particular suffers the onslaught of a "new" culture which speaks the language of progress, liberation, modernity, but which bears the seeds of a social, moral and religious subjectivism which deprives many— youth especially— of the noble ideals and sense of responsibility needed to direct behavior to goodness and truth. Certain trends which are also penetrating some sectors of Philippine society are in contrast with the great values of traditional Filipino culture. Your pastoral mission therefore goes to the heart of Philippine society, seeking to strengthen its cohesion with the life-giving truth of the Gospel and leading it to ever greater heights of nobility and humaneness through your constant appeal to moral responsibility and effective solidarity with all, especially the poor and the suffering.

Catholic lay men and women, especially parents, educators and those active in public life and in the communications media, must be helped and encouraged in their efforts to bring the social and moral teaching of the Church into play in meeting the challenges of the present moment of Philippine history. The Church in your country is charged with presenting a supremely valid message of reconciliation and integral development to society, and with effectively serving the spiritual and other needs of the peoples to which she is sent. *The Church, in fact, has been sent.* That is her nature. She is not another structure of humanitarian concern or political organization, but the very "*mystery*" of the Father's love made incarnate in Jesus Christ and always present through the work of the Holy Spirit. Of this "mystery" you are stewards and ambassadors (Cfr. 1 Cor. 4, 1; 2 Cor. 5, 20).

3. The Church has been sent to announce the Good News of redemption in Jesus Christ to all the nations of the earth (Cfr. *Matth.* 28, 19). In my recent Letter to the Fifth Plenary Meeting of Asian Bishops' Conferences I recalled that "on the eve of the Third Christian Millennium, an ever *greater commitment to evangelization is imperative* for all the local Churches in Asia. ... Today, *Christian lay people* in ever greater numbers *wish to share in this mission* and to do so with ever greater commitment. ... In conformity with their specific ministry, priests should be particularly active in the *Christian formation of lay people*, whose irreplaceable vocation is the sanctification of the world in all its temporal realities" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula occasione oblata V Congressus Plenarii Episcoporum Asiae*, 4 et 5, die 23 iun. 1990: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIII, 1 [1990] 1659 ss). In this great enterprise, in which the Church cannot fail her divine Lord, the Bishops have a unique role and primary responsibility. To you, together with your priests, applies the counsel expressed in the above mentioned Letter, that "freed from many administrative tasks undertaken to meet supplementary needs, the clergy can be models of a deep spirituality, witnesses to the transcendent values expressed in prayer and contemplation, and ever attentive to the presence of God in the lives of those whom they serve" (*Ibid.* 5: *l. c.*, pp. 1660 s).

4. In the Liturgy of the Hours of the Twenty-fourth Sunday we read a part of Saint Augustine's reflection on his own position as a member of the Church called to shepherd other members of the

Church: "I, besides being a Christian, and for this having to render an account of my life, am a leader also, and for this shall render to God an account of my ministry" (S. Augustini *Sermo 46, 2*). As Bishops, ours is a service of love, made up of innumerable acts of selfless dedication to others, for which we are constantly called to give account before our own conscience and before the Lord of heaven and earth. It is a ministry of solicitude for all Christ's brothers and sisters, indeed, for the whole world, before which we must stand as authentic witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Our hope and confidence lie not in ourselves, but in him who called us to this task. He gives the increase (Cfr. *1 Cor. 3, 7*).

Dear Brothers, with affection in the Lord I wish to encourage you to be faithful, wise and vigilant guides. Be assured of my remembrance of you and your people before the Lord, just as I commend my ministry to your prayers. May your present visit to Rome give you added incentive and support in the great responsibilities which are yours in the one country in Asia where the majority of the people are sons and daughters of the Church. This is your special grace, and also your special challenge. I am confident that such initiatives as the *National Catechetical Year* which you are now celebrating and the forthcoming *Second Plenary Council of the Church in the Philippines* will constitute a special grace for all the faithful, bringing a deeper understanding of their membership in the Body of Christ and a more vital decision to take an active part in the Church's mission. May God's abundant blessings be with you all.

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