



The Holy See

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

Friday, 5 October 1996

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. I warmly welcome you, *the second group of Philippine Bishops, on the occasion of your "ad limina" visit*. I greet you as "God's beloved, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7). Our meeting and your prayer at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul constitute a visible, joyful expression of the bonds of fraternal unity which the Holy Spirit has created between us through our sharing in the fullness of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. I pray that your visit will serve to encourage each one of you in the ministry entrusted to you: to proclaim, in all its integrity and with all the force of its demands, the mystery of Christ, the Word made flesh, and to confirm and strengthen your people in the faith which leads to salvation.

From your reports it is clear that the Church in the Philippines is experiencing a time of renewed commitment. In 1991 you celebrated the Second Plenary Council (PCP-II), the Decrees of which, revised and confirmed by the Holy See, offer a valid and demanding program for your pastoral ministry in the years ahead. Many regional and provincial Councils, diocesan Synods and pastoral assemblies have been held or are being prepared, as effective ways of implementing the National Pastoral Plan deriving from the Plenary Council. A great effort has been made and much has already been achieved. But you, the Pastors, are the first to recognize that so much more still needs to be done in the renewal of priestly life and training, in the youth apostolate, in involving the laity more fully in the Church's mission, in the service of the poor: all of which constitute priorities of your pastoral efforts. Your Conference has a vital role to play in organizing and giving impulse to the program of evangelization and renewal which the PCP-II has opened up before

you. But it is also true that it will be *the personal commitment and pastoral leadership of each one of you in your particular Churches* that will, to a great extent, make it possible for God's grace to thrive and blossom,

2. Everywhere in your land there are signs of *the Filipino people's rich religious traditions and devotion*. Your churches and shrines, your holidays and festivals, all speak of a spontaneous, confident approach to the Persons of the Blessed Trinity, to the saints, and especially to the Mother of the Savior, honored and invoked under titles which express her maternal role and her example of discipleship. Devotion to the Santo Nino is a well-known feature of popular religiosity in your country. I well remember the enthronement of the image of Our Lady of Antipolo at the Vigil of the 10th World Youth Day! All of this is a treasure of faith and piety to be preserved and communicated to each new generation. If any aspect of this popular piety needs to be purified of elements not in accord with the principles of faith, this should be done, gradually, through *solid instruction and catechesis* aimed at imbuing religious sentiment and external involvement with a true sense of inner conversion.

3. This leads us to reflect on the figure of the Bishop as *the teacher of the faith in his Diocese*. Bishops are "authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, 25). In a sense this is your main task, for it is from the preaching of those who are sent that the believing community is born: ". How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15). We have received the sacramental investiture which sets us apart as successors of the Apostles. To us has been entrusted the deposit of faith, along with the duty to preserve it intact and defend it against all threats. We must continually examine ourselves both regarding our fidelity *to the truths of the faith* which have been handed on and in relation to how we fulfill *the divine mandate to pass them on*. St Paul's admonition to Timothy is directly applicable to each one of us: "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16). From the time when I too became a Bishop this duty has been foremost in my mind and efforts. And later in my first Encyclical Letter, "[*Redemptor Hominis*](#)", I wrote: "Being responsible for that truth also means loving it and seeking the most exact understanding of it, in order to bring it closer to ourselves and others in all its saving power" (John Paul II, [*Redemptor Hominis*](#), 19). Bishops are called to grow, through personal prayer and study, in intimacy with the Holy Spirit in order to be able to assimilate and communicate the full content of the Christian message: "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn. 14:26) .

4. The duty of passing on the faith belongs so specifically to the Bishop that no one can substitute for him, although *all can and ought to co-operate with him and share in that mission* in differing degrees. The good Pastor will know how to enlist and encourage the active collaboration of everyone: priests, religious and catechists. He will ensure that resources and personnel are

committed to theological and catechetical studies and teaching, and to evangelization in all its forms, not excluding the use of the media. In this great personal and collective responsibility to pass on the full content of the faith, every member of the Church has a role to play. But the role and responsibility of the Bishop is original and distinctive. Where necessary he will invite the faithful to remember that "it is the Bishop's role in the particular Churches to preserve and to interpret God's word and to judge authoritatively what is or is not in accord with it" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the ecclesial vocation of the theologian: Donum Veritatis*, 19 [24 May 1990]).

True, the Holy Spirit distributes his gifts of knowledge and grace without distinction: "The same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). Most often he does so in a quiet and hidden manner, leading souls to a deep inner union with God's will. Sometimes, though, it may seem that his gifts are more visible and striking in their effect on the lives of certain individuals or communities. The more apparent the gifts, the more discernment is required on the part of Pastors, lest "even the elect be led astray" (cf. Mt. 24:24). The Holy Spirit who distributes his gifts is the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures and who assists the Magisterium of the Church, *to which is entrusted the authentic interpretation of these Scriptures*" (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 12)

5. In order to meet the challenges of a world which is approaching the new Millennium in a state of widespread spiritual and cultural uncertainty, the Church in the Philippines—as everywhere—is faced with the enormous challenge of *strengthening catechesis* at every level. All other forms of the apostolate and service will benefit from *an ever more enlightened Catholic culture*. Millions of children and young people need instruction in the basic tenets of the faith if they are to become committed members of the ecclesial community. Parents need help to fulfill their task as primary educators in the ways of God. Even the well-educated often need help to formulate their faith and live it fully in the face of the complexity of modern living and the multitude of views and opinions being expressed. How does a Bishop go about responding to such challenges? His immediate concern will be to ensure that his priests receive a solid human, spiritual, theological and pastoral formation, for when priests are able to transmit with certainty and conviction *the content of the faith, the fides quae creditur*, their ministry has lasting effects in the training of consciences and the animation of the apostolate: "the more the lay apostolate develops, the more strongly is perceived the need to have well-formed holy priests" (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 3).

In recent years you have made great efforts to improve priestly training. The aim of those responsible for seminaries must be to provide "an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of formation, so that the person who is called to the priesthood by God may become, with the sacrament of orders, a living image of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church" (*Ibid.*, 42). As a body, your Conference should examine the situation in order to overcome regional disparities in the training of priests, seeking to raise the educational level of all seminaries through a greater exchange of personnel between Dioceses, and from religious congregations. The role of

superiors, spiritual directors and educators is of such importance for the future growth and well-being of the whole ecclesial community that no Bishop should hesitate to commit personnel and resources to this work.

6. As those primarily responsible for the Church's life in your Dioceses, you also have duties *regarding the solid training of the members of religious institutes*, of both men and women. With respect for the internal autonomy of such communities, as laid down by the law of the Church or by particular legislation, your personal closeness and support can do much to strengthen consecrated men and women in their specific vocation to serve Christ and his Kingdom through the witness of the evangelical counsels. I heartily encourage you to intensify the dialogue between the Bishops' Conference and the Conferences of Major Superiors, especially where there is a need to offset any theological disorientation in consecrated persons and groups, or where a lowering in the tenor of the spiritual and communal life has brought a loss of identity, a weakening of the public witness of the consecrated life in society, or a disregard for the genuine charismatic and sacrificial character of consecration. Religious are called to represent in the Church and the world the obedient, chaste and poor Christ. All that you do to sustain them in this splendid but demanding vocation will redound in abundant blessings upon your particular Churches.

7. While it is not possible, or necessary, for me to mention every aspect of your ministry, I do wish to confirm you in the commitment you have repeatedly expressed regarding *the care of migrant workers*. Your Pastoral Letter "Comfort my people, comfort them"—to mention only the most recent one on the subject—speaks forthrightly about this immense problem, and draws attention to the sufferings of many Filipino migrants, to the needs of their families left at home, and to the ecclesial community's duty to help these people wherever they go. A generous and loving identification of Bishops, priests, religious and laity with the Good Samaritan will enable the Church in the Philippines to expand its efforts in this direction

Another area of your mission involves *the tribal populations*, concentrated in certain areas of your country. Their way of life is undergoing profound changes, not all of which are positive, and not least as a result of the fact that their habitat is being destroyed by industrial deforestation. This pressure on their traditional culture makes them vulnerable to various forms of fundamentalism, and this is a matter which should engage the whole Church in the Philippines. A concerted program of human development: and evangelization, respectful of all the values to be found in those people's cultures, is another of the challenges which call for generosity and zeal on the part of priests, religious and committed lay volunteers. I recommend to your collective pastoral concern the work of your Conference's Commission on Tribal Filipinos, so that the welfare aspects of the approach to these groups will be accompanied by a serious and confident evangelization,

8. Dear Brother Bishops, in reflecting with you on your ministry as Successors of the Apostles, my aim has been above all to encourage you in your fidelity to the Lord, and to urge you to place your trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, through whom you abound in hope (cf. Rom. 15:13). Do not

shrink from the hard work ahead, work often complicated by obstacles and difficulties, for, as St Paul reminds us, "in all these things we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us" (*Ibid.*, 8:37). All is possible with God's help. I pray that through your efforts and teaching the whole Church in the Philippines will be filled with the power of God, and that under your leadership the Catholic community will be tireless in building a civilization of truth and love. I commend you and all the faithful to the loving intercession of the Mother of the Redeemer, and as a token of my closeness I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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