



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES I, GUAM (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II), JAPAN, ANCHORAGE (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II)
(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

HOLY MASS FOR THE INDIGENOUS TRIBES

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Baguio City (Philippines)

Sunday, 22 February 1981

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. It is a joy for me to celebrate with you the Holy Eucharist, to come to you among your beautiful mountains to be nourished by the word of God and the Bread of life, and to unite with you in giving glory and praise, honor and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity.

The Liturgy of the Word today speaks of the special dignity which has been given to all who "belong to Christ"^[1]. We are invited to meditate on the profound mystery which is ours through Baptism, the mystery of how, *by water and the Holy Spirit, we have become the dwelling-place of God*. "You are God's temple", writes Saint Paul, "God's Spirit dwells in you"^[2]. This is indeed a mystery of faith. For while we remain members of a particular people and nation, the heirs of a unique culture and ancestry, at the same time, because of God's abundant mercy, we have become "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord"^[3].

2. In a special way I have looked forward to this opportunity of meeting the people of the Mountain Provinces, of meeting you who are members of the Isneg, Balinga, Bontoc, Ifugao, Bankanay and Ibaloy Tribes. You, the indigenous peoples of this beautiful northern region of Luzon, as well as

the other Tribal Filipinos, represent a rich diversity of cultures which have been handed down to you by your parents and grandparents, and which extend back through countless generations.

May you always have a deep appreciation of these cultural treasures which divine providence has destined you to inherit. Moreover, may these treasures which are your heritage always be respected by others; may your land and your worthy family traditions and social structures be protected, preserved and enriched.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, you have discovered how the Gospel does not threaten the survival of your cultures or destroy your authentic traditions. For all that is truly human, all that contributes to the welfare and betterment of the human person, is strengthened by the Gospel and enhanced by faith in Christ. It could not be otherwise, since Christ is the model and origin of the new humanity, the "first born of all creation"^[4].

As you face the present problems associated with social and economic growth in your country, I assure you that *the Church is one with you in your longing to preserve your unique cultures and in your desire to participate in decisions which affect your lives and the lives of your children*. For the Church never dissociates herself from the temporal problems of her members. She remains close to the poor and suffering ; she longs for justice and peace ; and she concerns herself with the concrete needs of the faithful. Yet in all this, the Church never forgets the primacy of her spiritual mission, remembering that her ultimate goal is to lead all men and women to eternal salvation in Christ.

3. Permit me at this time to speak to you about the *missionary activity of the Church* and to reflect on its fruitful results here in your own land. As I look out over this vast crowd, I cannot help being reminded of the dedicated missionaries, both men and women, who left their own native lands to proclaim the Gospel in your midst. They accepted many personal sacrifices and shouldered many burdens in order to carry out this work, in order to bring you the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And their efforts were not in vain ! When the message of Christ was proclaimed to you, "you accepted it", as Saint Paul writes, "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers"^[5]. For this marvelous work of grace I rejoice with you ! And in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his Church, I thank the missionaries for their faith and for their sustained efforts and persevering labor.

It is heartening to see the vitality of the Church in the Philippines : to see for example the active part played by the laity, the contribution made by catechists, social action workers and so many others, the indispensable role of Christian families—each in its own way furthering the Kingdom of God. In addition there has been the establishment of numerous Catholic schools and universities, institutions for health care and other needs, and the foundation of seminaries such as the ones in Baguio City—all these bear witness to the fruitfulness of God's word and to the depth of your own

faith in the Lord. I am pleased especially at the way in which many Filipinos have responded to the call of Christ to serve the Church as priests and religious, not only at home but in other countries as well. Clearly, the missionary activity of the Church has borne abundant fruit in your land.

4. My brothers and sisters, mindful of the way you have responded so wholeheartedly to the Gospel since it was first proclaimed to you, and urged on by the missionary mandate given to us by Christ, I wish to tell you of *my special desire; that the Filipinos will become the foremost missionaries of the Church in Asia*. In this regard I would like to make my own the words which Pope Paul VI addressed to you on the occasion of his own pastoral visit to the Philippines :

"At this moment one cannot but think of the important calling of the peoples of the Philippine Islands. This land has a special vocation to be the city set on the hill, the lamp standing on high^[6] giving shining witness amid the ancient and noble cultures of Asia. Both as individuals and as a nation you are to show forth the light of Christ by the quality of your lives" (29 November 1970).

Among all your neighbors in this part of the world, the citizens of the Philippines are unique. Your country alone has a majority of Christians. Indeed you number more than half of all the Catholics of Asia. In view of this, I ask : has not the Lord of history destined you to play a prominent role in the missionary effort of the Church in this region? Has he not prepared you "to give shining witness amid the ancient and noble cultures of Asia?" Are not the last words that Jesus spoke to his disciples especially relevant for you at this point in time : "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation"^[7]?

This is my heartfelt desire and fervent prayer : that you, my brothers and sisters of the Philippines, may now take your place in the forefront of the Church's missionary effort, especially here in Asia. For this reason I express my deep satisfaction at the creation only a few years ago of the Mission Society of the Philippines ; and I also applaud the work of evangelization carried out by Radio Veritas. May God abundantly bless these initiatives. And may each of you who have become a dwelling-place of God through Baptism contribute in your own way to the proclamation of the Gospel. By word and deed may you proclaim that Jesus Christ is "the way and the truth and the life"^[8], that Jesus Christ is Lord !

[1] 1 Cor 3:23.

[2] 1 Cor 3:16.

[3] Eph 2:19.

[4] Col 1:15.

[5] *1 Thess 2:13.*

[6] Cf. *Mt 5:14-16.*

[7] *Mki 16:15.*

[8] *Jn 14:6.*

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