



The Holy See

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(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE POOR PEOPLE OF THE DISTRICT OF TONDO**

Manila

Wednesday, 18 February 1981

Mga ginigiliw kong kapatid kay Kristo (My dear brothers and sisters in Christ),

1. Kay tindi ng ligaya na aking nadarama sa mga sandaling ito ! (What intense happiness I feel at this very moment!) I have looked forward to this visit, because I wanted to tell you that you are the Pope's beloved friends, to whom he wishes to bring the message of love that Jesus entrusted to his Church. *My visit to you as the successor of the Apostle Peter is a visit of love.* It cannot be anything else, because I see in you Christ himself and to him I have pledged my love. In telling Peter that he was to be the shepherd of the flock, Jesus asked him three times, with ever greater insistence : "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"^[1]. And Saint Peter professed his love for Christ. I too profess my love for Christ, and in coming to you I simply want to give testimony to that love. I simply want to repeat to you the words of Christ who said : "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you"^[2].

2. I thank the Lord for giving me this opportunity to come to Tondo District and meet the people of Foreshoreland, and in particular the people of the Parish of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage. *The name Tondo is linked in a special way with the name of my predecessor Paul VI, the first worldwide pilgrim Pope of modern times.* When he came here more than ten years ago, he blessed the beginnings of this parish in the middle of an area where human and Christian needs were many and deep. He pleaded for greater respect for the rights of the human person, for the dignity of the children of God ; he asked for greater awareness of the plight of the people on the

part of civil and Church authorities.

I have been told that much has happened since that time, that the various sectors of society have shown greater concern, and especially that the people of Tondo themselves have achieved much by forming their own organizations for spiritual, pastoral, social and economic development. But so much more needs to be done to make Tondo a place of hope for every man, woman and child who calls this place home.

3. When we think about the many problems that face you daily, when we think about the many people in other areas, in the slums of the big cities and in the neglected rural zones in other parts of the Philippines, then we think about Christ. *In the faces of the poor I see the face of Christ. In the life of the poor I see reflected the life of Christ.*

In turn, the poor and those discriminated against identify more easily with Christ, for in him they discover one of their own. Right from the beginning of his life, at the blessed moment of his birth as Son of the Virgin Mary, Jesus was homeless, for there was no place for him in the inn^[3]. When his parents took him up to Jerusalem for the first time, to present their offering in the temple, they were numbered among the poor and they offered the gift of the poor^[4]. In his childhood he was a refugee, forced to flee the hatred that broke loose in persecution, to leave his own land and live in exile on foreign soil. As a boy, he was able to confound the learned teachers with his wisdom, but he still worked with his hands as a humble carpenter like his foster-father Joseph. After speaking out and explaining the Scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth, "the carpenter's son" was rejected^[5]. Even one of the disciples chosen to follow him asked: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"^[6].

He was also the victim of injustice and torture and was put to death without anyone coming to his defense. Yes, he was the brother of the poor; it was his mission—for he was sent by God the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit—to proclaim the Gospel to the poor^[7]. He praised the poor when he uttered this unsettling challenge to all who want to be his followers : "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"^[8].

4. *Blessed are the poor in spirit!* This is the opening statement of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus proclaimed the Beatitudes as the program for all who want to follow him. The Beatitudes were meant not only for the people of his own day but for all generations throughout the ages ; they are an invitation to everyone who accepts the name of Christian. This was the message that I held up in Brazil to the slum dwellers in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro and to the inhabitants of the muddy peninsula of Salvador da Bahia. This is the message that I present to rich and poor alike, the message that the Church in the Philippines, as elsewhere, must make her own and put into practice. Any Church that wants to be a Church of the poor must heed this challenge, discover its full depth and implement its full truth.

Here in Tondo, and in other parts of this land, there are many poor people, and in them I also see the *poor in spirit* whom Jesus called blessed. The poor in spirit are these that keep their eyes on God, and their hearts open to his divine workings. They accept the gift of life as a gift from on high, and value it because it comes from God. With gratitude towards the Creator and mercy towards their fellow human beings, they are ready to share what they have with those in greater need. They love their families and children and share their homes and tables with the hungry child and the homeless youth. The poor in spirit grow rich in human qualities; they are close to God, ready to listen to his voice and to sing his praises.

5. Being poor in spirit does not mean being unconcerned with the problems that beset the community, and nobody has a keener sense of justice than the poor people who suffer the injustices that circumstances and human selfishness heap upon them. Finding strength in human solidarity, the poor by their very existence indicate the obligation of justice that confronts society and all who have power, whether economic, cultural or political. *And so it is the same truth of the first Beatitude that indicates a path that every person must walk.*

It tells those that live in material poverty that their dignity, their human dignity, must be preserved, that their inviolable human rights must be cherished and protected. It also tells them that they themselves can achieve much if they pool their skills and talents, and especially their determination to be the artisans of their own progress and development.

The first Beatitude tells the rich, who enjoy material well-being or who accumulate a disproportionate share of material goods, that man is great not by reason of what he possesses but by what he is—not by what he has but by what he shares with others. Poor in spirit is the rich man who does not close heart, but faces up to the intolerable situations that perpetuate the poverty and misery of the many who are constantly hungry and deprived of their rightful chances to grow and develop their human potential, who lack decent housing and sufficient clothing, who suffer illness for want of even basic health care, who grow desperate for want of employment that would enable them to provide, through honest work, for the needs of their families.

Poor in spirit indeed is the rich man who does not rest so long as a brother or sister is entrapped in injustice and powerlessness. Poor in spirit is the one who holds political power and remembers that it is given for the common good only, and who never ceases to devise means to organize all sectors of society according to the demands of the dignity and equality that is the birthright of every man, woman and child that God has called into existence.

6. The Church herself, the Church in Asia, in the Philippines and in Tondo, will heed the call of the Beatitudes and be *the Church of the poor because she must do what Jesus did and proclaim the Gospel to the poor*^[9]. But the preference that the Church shows for the poor and underprivileged does not mean that she directs her concern only to one group or class or category.

She preaches the same message to all : that God loves man and sent his Son for the salvation of all, that Jesus Christ is the Savior, "the way, and the truth, and the life"[10]. Being the Church of the poor means that she will speak the language of the Beatitudes to all people, to all groups or professions, to all ideologies, to all political and economic systems. She does so, not to serve political interests, nor to acquire power, nor to offer pretexts for violence, but to save man in his humanity and in his supernatural destiny.

Defending the human dignity of the poor and their hope for a human future is not a luxury for the Church, nor is it a strategy of opportunism, nor a means for currying favor with the masses. It is her duty because it is God who wishes all human beings to live in accordance with the dignity that he bestowed on them. It is the mission of the Church to travel the path of man "because man—without any exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man—with each man without any exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it"[11].

The Church will therefore preach to the poor the whole Gospel ; she will encourage them to be faithful to the divine life which they have received in Baptism, the life which is nourished in the Eucharist and which is revived and supported through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For the same reason, I encourage you, the people of Tondo, and all the People of God in the Philippines, to exercise your individual and corporate responsibility for increasing catechetical instruction as you endeavor to implement fully the social teachings of the Church. Be fully convinced of how important it is for every future generation of Filipinos to be aware of the supreme dignity to which they are called, which is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

7. My dear friends of Tondo, *be faithful to Christ, and joyfully embrace his Gospel of salvation*. Do not be tempted by ideologies that preach only material values or purely temporal ideals, which separate political, social and economic development from the things of the spirit, and in which happiness is sought apart from Christ. The road towards your total liberation is not the way of violence, class struggle or hate ; it is the way of love, brotherhood and peaceful solidarity. I know that you understand me, you the poor of Tondo, for you are blessed and possess the kingdom of heaven. And when I go away, always remember these words of Jesus : "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"[12].

Because of Christ I make all your concerns and struggles my own ; because of my love in Christ I am with you in your efforts to secure a worthy future for yourselves and your children ; because of Christ's supreme love for you I preach to you an uplifting Gospel of eternal life.

I pray for you, for each one of you, for your families, for your children, for the young and the old, for the sick and the suffering. I pray that the strength of Jesus may be in your hearts as you work together to improve your lives, to be good Christians and good citizens. I pray that you will find Jesus in each other and in every fellow human being. And I pray that together you will find him and

adore him—the eternal Son of God—in the arms of his Mother, Mary.

And may Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage be a loving Mother to you all!

Mabuhay kayong lahat ! (Long live you all !)

[1] *Jn* 21:15 ff.

[2] *Jn* 15:9.

[3] *Lk* 2:7.

[4] Cf. *Lk* 2:25.

[5] *Mt* 1:55 cf. *Lk* 4:29.

[6] *Jn* 1:46.

[7] *Lk* 4:18.

[8] *Mt* 5:3.

[9] Cf. *Lk* 4:18.

[10] *Jn* 14:6.

[11] *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.

[12] *Jn* 8:36.

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