



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 IN THE CATHEDRAL OF MANILA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Manila (Philippines)

Tuesday, 17 February 1981

Dearly beloved in Christ,

1. Four hundred years ago this year, Bishop Domingo de Salazar arrived in Manila. He had been sent by Pope Gregory XIII to be the first Bishop of this newly created Diocese, and he had come to continue here in your country the work of evangelization and to build upon the achievements of the missionaries who had preceded him.

As I celebrate the Eucharist today in the Cathedral of Manila I feel a spiritual closeness to Bishop de Salazar and to Pope Gregory. The same love for the Gospel and for the Filipino people which inspired them has in turn prompted me, the present Bishop of Rome, to come to your beloved land to proclaim the message of Christ and to strengthen you in the faith.

This is a moment of great joy for me as I celebrate the Eucharist with you in the Cathedral of Manila, as we unite our hearts and voices in proclaiming the greatness of God and in giving praise and glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. We do this, recalling the great efforts at renewal made by this local Church in Manila during the year 1979, and asking God to bring to fruition the good work begun in the Archdiocesan Synod.

During these days it will be my special honor to beatify Lorenzo Ruiz, one of your own

countrymen, the father of a family and a layman of courageous faith. Among all the events by which you have commemorated *the fourth centenary of the Church in Manila, the beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz* and his fifteen martyr companions holds a principal place. May it also be an encouragement for all of you—Bishops, priests, religious and laity—to strive after the holiness that is found in Christ Jesus.

2. At this time I wish to address a special message to the men religious—both priests and brothers—who are present here, and through them to all the men religious of the Philippines. May I begin, my brothers, by expressing my gratitude to the Lord for your presence in the Church and for your collaboration in the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the passage from Saint John which we have just heard, we are reminded of the *essence of religious life*. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit"[1]. Through the initiative of the Savior and your own free response, *Christ* has become *the purpose of your life and the center of all your thoughts*. It is because of Christ that you made your profession of the evangelical counsels ; and it is Christ who will sustain you in faithfulness to himself and in loving service to his Church.

Religious consecration is essentially *an act of love*: Christ's love for you and in return your love for him and for all his brethren. This mystery is proclaimed today in the Gospel, when Jesus says to his disciples : "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you ; abide in my love"[2]. Christ wants you to abide in him, to be nourished by him daily in the celebration of the Eucharist and to surrender your lives to him through prayer and self-denial. Trusting in his word and confident of his mercy, you respond to Christ's love. You choose to follow him more closely in chastity, poverty and obedience ; and you want to share more completely in the life and holiness of the Church. You want to love all those whom Christ loves as brothers and sisters.

3. The world today needs to see your love for Christ. It needs the *public witness of religious life*. As Paul VI once said : "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"[3]. If the non-believers of this world are to come to believe in Christ, they need your faithful witness—a witness which springs from your complete trust in the bountiful mercy of the Father and your persevering hope in the power of the Cross and Resurrection.

And so the ideals, values and convictions which underlie your commitment to Christ must be translated into the language of daily life. In the midst of the people of God, in the local ecclesial community, your public witness is part of your contribution to the mission of the Church. As Saint Paul says, "You are a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts"[4].

4. As religious brothers and priests you are engaged in a *great variety of apostolic activities*:

proclaiming the word of God, administering the sacraments, teaching, catechizing, caring for the sick, assisting the poor and orphans, exercising charity, serving by prayer and sacrifice, building up the local communities to reflect the Gospel and embody the Kingdom of God. As you carry out these works of service with steadfast perseverance, remember the advice of Saint Paul : "Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, do it for the Lord rather than for men"[5].

All these apostolic activities retain their importance today. They continue to be vital dimensions of evangelization, bearing prophetic witness to God's love and contributing to full human advancement. I am sure that the community in general, as well as the ecclesial community, will be grateful to the religious for helping the Church to maintain her commitment to these diverse expressions of her pastoral activity.

At the same time, you rightly seek additional ways of bearing witness to Christ and serving his people. The Church must indeed be attentive to the needs of the men and women of our time. She cannot be indifferent to the problems which they face or to the injustices which they suffer. As you seek new ways of furthering the Gospel and of promoting human values, I offer you my encouragement and the assurance of my prayers.

At the same time I ask you to observe this guideline : that each apostolic endeavor should be in harmony with the teaching of the Church, with the apostolic purposes of your individual Institutes and with the original charism of your founders. May I also remind you of my words at Puebla : "You are priests and religious ; you are not social or political leaders or officials of a temporal power ... Let us not be under the illusion that we are serving the Gospel if we 'dilute' our charism through an exaggerated interest in the wide field of temporal problems"[6]. It is important for people to see you as "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God"[7].

5. Faithfulness to Christ in religious life requires a *threefold fidelity: fidelity to the Gospel, fidelity to the Church, fidelity to the particular charism of your Institutes.*

First of all, you must be *faithful to the Gospel*. We are reminded of this by the Second Vatican Council, which taught : "the fundamental norm of religious life is the following of Christ as it is presented to us in the Gospel"[8]. For this reason you make it your first priority to listen to the word of God, ponder it in your heart and seek to put it into practice. May you find time every day to meditate on God's word, being confident in its power to enlighten your minds and to bring to life within you the spirit of the Beatitudes.

Secondly, your *religious consecration*, in addition to strengthening your commitment to Christ, also *binds you inseparably to the life and holiness of his Spouse, the Church*. And it is in the local ecclesial community that this is given concrete expression. This is the reason why it is so important for you to work in close collaboration with the clergy and laity of the local Church, and to accept willingly the authority and ministry of the local Bishop as the focus of its unity.

In this connection I would like to underline two relevant expressions of this commitment to the local Church. The first is the relationship of religious priests with the diocesan clergy. Religious priests should be happy to take part in the apostolate of the local Church, in a loyal and disinterested way, with the diocesan priests, whose tasks they are called to share, not by way of exception, but on a regular basis.

The second is the relationship with the National Conference of Bishops. In the spirit of the Document *Mutuae Relationes*, religious superiors should seek, accept, and cultivate a frank and filial dialogue with the Pastors, whom the Holy Spirit has placed to govern the Church of God. In this sense it cannot be stressed too much how important are the relations between the National Conference of Bishops, whose task it is to work out and establish pastoral plans for the country, and the Associations of Major Religious Superiors, which assume the task of promoting the religious life, taking care that it should remain faithful to its deepest roots and to the charism that characterizes it.

As religious you are in a position to make a special contribution to the promotion of the unity of the Church. Your experience of community life, common prayer and corporate apostolic service prepares you for this task. May you dedicate yourselves to the great cause of unity with renewed vigor, seeking, in a spirit of openness and respect, to break down barriers of division and to encourage the progress of harmony and mutual collaboration.

Finally, may you *always be faithful to the particular charism of your individual Institutes*. To illustrate this point I wish to acknowledge two events of great significance to the Church in the Philippines occurring this year : first the three hundredth anniversary of the Christian Brothers of de la Salle. The instruction of young people in the Christian faith and in the other subjects remains as indispensable for the mission of Christ as at the time when this Congregation was founded. And the Church in the Philippines has been greatly blessed through their consecrated lives and dedicated service.

The second event is the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the presence of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines. Through their missionary efforts, through their work in schools and parishes and through the spirituality of Saint Ignatius, the priests and brothers of the Society of Jesus have made a great contribution to the Philippines and throughout the world.

Similarly, all the religious families represented here today, each in a distinctive way, contribute to the life and holiness of the Church. An indication of the effectiveness of your contributions has been, and continues to be, your *faithfulness to the spirit of your founders, to their evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity*. May this faithfulness to your respective charisms always be seen as part of your fidelity to Christ.

6. In closing, may I say once again that your life of consecration and your partnership in the

Gospel fill me with joy in my role as Pastor of the universal Church. I have come here to this Cathedral to celebrate with you and the entire ecclesial community the holiness of Christ's Church and the marvels of grace that have been accomplished in this Archdiocese during the past four centuries of evangelization.

It is my prayer that the commemoration of this anniversary will be an added incentive for you to make your specific contribution as religious to the life of this local Church and to the life of the Church throughout the whole country. I pray that zealous religious will continue, as in the past four centuries, to serve the People of God faithfully by word and deed. And by your own generous and joyful example may young men be encouraged to carry on the traditions in this new era of grace.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother and model of all religious, assist you by her prayers. May she be your constant guide on the journey of faith to the heavenly Father, and may she help you to attain your highest goal: oneness in love with our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1] *Jn* 15:16.

[2] *Jn* 15:9.

[3] *AAS* 66 (1974), 568.

[4] *2 Cor* 3:3.

[5] *Col* 3:23.

[6] *AAS* 71 (1979), p. 193.

[7] *1 Cor* 4:1.

[8] *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

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