



# The Holy See

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

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE  
PHILIPPINE EPISCOPATE AND ASIAN BISHOPS**

*Villa San Miguel (Manila)*  
*Tuesday, 17 February 1981*

*Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,*

1. Since my arrival on Philippine soil, I have already had the occasion to state that my first and principal reason for coming here is the Beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz, whose martyrdom shows forth the holiness of the Church. At the same time I consider my pastoral visit a pilgrimage to the living shrine of the people of God in this land. And today, in you, the Bishops, I greet every ecclesial community that makes up the Church in the Philippines.

My thoughts go likewise to the past generations who have received and passed on the Catholic faith. In the name of the universal Church I express praise and thanksgiving to God for this great gift that your people have received and preserved. I give thanks also for the special vocation that has been given to the Church in the Philippines. In coming to you it is my desire to fulfill my pastoral service to the faithful in your land and to all of you, their Bishops. And so we gather together to represent the scene of the Acts of the Apostles where Peter and the Eleven assemble to speak about Jesus and to reflect on the power of his Spirit. Just being with you is enough to draw strength and power from the One who is in our midst. And on my part I wish, in fidelity to Christ, *to confirm you in the faith that you hold and proclaim.*

2. My coming is linked to the conviction that *the word of God is powerful* and, when faithfully preached, is light and strength for our people. It is in truth the foundation of their faith. That is why

we never cease to communicate to them the conviction of Saint Paul: "Your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God"[1].

As pastors of God's people we have the role of announcing "God's design in its entirety"[2]. Through *the full proclamation of Christ* and his Gospel a gentle but invincible force is unleashed in the world. In this regard let me share with you two testimonies of particular interest for you as Bishops in the Philippines.

The first is that of *Paul VI*. It was the great testimony that he gave ten years ago in Quezon Circle. Speaking about Christ he said : "I feel the need to proclaim him, I cannot keep silent. 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel'[3]. I am sent by him, by Christ himself, to do this, I am an apostle, I am a witness ... I must bear witness to his name : Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God[4]. He reveals the invisible God, he is the firstborn of all creation, the foundation of everything created. He is the Teacher of mankind, and its Redeemer ... Jesus Christ is our constant preaching; it is his name that we proclaim to the ends of the earths[5] and throughout all ages"[6] (November 29, 1970). This was his mission ten years ago, and some of you were present then, together with the late Cardinal Santos and with the other Bishops of that time. And I am convinced that, sometime in the future, yet another Successor of Peter will gather with your successors in this same proclamation of the faith.

The second testimony that I wish to recall with you is likewise a very special one. Certainly a number of you were present to hear *John Paul I* speak the following words to the Philippine Bishops gathered in Rome for their *ad limina* visit : "On our part we hope to sustain you, support you, and encourage you in the great mission of the episcopate: to proclaim Jesus Christ and to evangelize his people ... A great challenge of our day is the full evangelization of all those who have been baptized. In this, the Bishops of the Church have a prime responsibility. Our message must be a clear proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ" (September 28, 1978). It was a memorable testimony for its contents and for the circumstances in which it was given. It was the last public act of John Paul I; it was the last hour of his public ministry. It was his legacy—and it was for you. And I wish to perpetuate his testimony and to make it my own today.

**3.** This proclamation of Jesus Christ and salvation in his name is *the basis for all pastoral service*. It is the content of all evangelization and catechesis. And it is a credit to you that you accomplish it in union with the Successor of Peter and with the whole Church. It must always be so.

Your unity with the universal Church is the authentication of all your pastoral initiatives and the guarantee of their supernatural effectiveness. This unity was indeed the concern that motivated Saint Paul to take counsel so that the course he was pursuing and had pursued "would not prove useless"[7]. I thank God today for *your Catholic unity* and the strength it gives you.

**4.** Fortified by the word of Christ and strengthened in the unity of his Church, you are well able to

pursue effectively your pastoral ministry in imitation of Jesus the Good Shepherd. The suggestion that Saint Paul received in his consultation I would repeat today : "The only stipulation was that we should be mindful of the poor—the one thing that I was making every effort to do"[8]. And may this be the special mark of your ministry too: *concern for the poor*, for those who are materially or spiritually in need. Renee your pastoral love will embrace those in want, those afflicted, those in sin.

And let us remember that the *greatest good we can give them is the word of God*. This does not mean that we do not assist them in their physical needs, but it does mean that they need something more, and that we have something more to give : the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With great pastoral insight and evangelical love, John Paul I also expressed this thought succinctly on that day he died : "From the days of the Gospel, and in imitation of the Lord, who 'went about doing good'[9], the Church is irrevocably committed to contributing to the relief of physical misery and need. But her pastoral charity would be incomplete if she did not point out even 'higher needs'. In the Philippines Paul VI did precisely this. At a moment when he chose to speak about the poor, about justice and peace, about human rights, about economic and social liberation—at a moment when he also effectively committed the Church to the alleviation of misery—he did not and could not remain silent about 'higher good', the fullness of life in the Kingdom of heaven".

5. Another aspect of your ministry is the fraternal interest that you have for *your brother priests*. They need to be convinced of your love; they need your example of holiness and they have to see you as their spiritual leaders, as heralds of the Gospel, so that they too can concentrate all their energies on their proper priestly role in the building up of Christ's Kingdom of justice and peace.

In this regard it is important that the laity be given the full responsibility that is specifically theirs. Through their activity in the temporal order they have a special task to fulfill, in order to bring about the consecration of the world to God. It is a lofty task, and they need their Bishops and priests to support them through spiritual leadership.

At the same time it has to be apparent in the Body of Christ, where there is a diversity of functions, that the laity are worthy of trust, that they can accomplish what the Lord has assigned specifically to them. This will also make it possible for the clergy to pay full heed to the apostolic injunction to concentrate on "prayer and the ministry of the word"[10]. The Spirit of God continues to confirm these priorities of the priestly ministry for each generation in the Church.

6. In reflecting on the Church in the Philippines, the *missionary aspect* emerges in various ways. There is first of all your glorious missionary beginning, in which your ancestors embraced the message of salvation that was proclaimed to them. To reflect on this is to praise God in your history, in the generosity of the missionaries that continues into the present.

To reflect on your missionary past is to be challenged to go forward with the same zeal. In order to

understand your missionary destiny, it is enough to listen to the Prophet Isaiah who urges you: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn[11]. There are indeed many places where the name of Jesus is not yet known and where his Gospel is yet to be proclaimed among you. It will be your zeal and that of your priests, together with the commitment of the whole ecclesial community, that will devise means to pursue initial evangelization and subsequent catechesis in the face of a harvest that is immense.

At the same time you will hear other nations, especially your neighbors in Asia, calling to you : "Come over ... and help us"[12]. There is no doubt about it : the Philippines have a special missionary vocation to proclaim the Good News, to carry the light of Christ to the nations. It must be accomplished with personal sacrifice, and in spite of limited resources, but God will not be wanting with his grace and he will supply your needs.

Paul VI confirmed this missionary vocation of yours during his visit here, and repeatedly thereafter. From many points of view, dear Brothers, you are truly called to be a missionary Church.

7. As you endeavor to fulfill your pastoral charge, I know that you will recall the words with which the Gospel records the calling of the Apostles: "And he appointed Twelve to be with him and to be sent out to preach"[13]. The two aspects of the apostolic vocation may seem mutually exclusive, but it is not so. Jesus wants us both to stay with him and to go out to preach. We are meant to be his companions and his friends, as well as his tireless apostles. In a word, we *are called to holiness*. There can be no successful episcopal ministry without holiness of life, because our ministry is modeled on that of the chief Pastor and the Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ[14].

My dear Brothers, in our intimate friendship with Jesus Christ we shall find strength for fraternal love, the power to touch hearts and to proclaim a convincing message. In the love of Jesus we shall discover the way to build community in Christ and to serve our people, giving them the word of God. By sharing in the holiness of Jesus we shall exercise *an authentic prophetic role*: announcing holiness and courageously practising it as an example to be followed in the ecclesial community. To be faithful to the tradition that is ours, let us remember the Apostle Peter exhorting us : "Be examples to the flock"[15].

8. To these important aspects of our pastoral ministry that I have mentioned—*God's word, unity and holiness*—I would add a final word of fraternal exhortation, and it is this: *let us trust fully in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ*, let us trust in his power to renew, by the action of his Spirit, the face of the earth. Our mission and our destiny, linked with that of our people, are in the hands of God, who has given all power of redemption and sanctification to Jesus Christ. And it is Christ who tells us today that we are strong in him and sustained by his promise : "I am with you always until the end of the world"[16].

And finally, as Bishops we feel ourselves enveloped by the gentle and maternal love of Mary,

Mother of Jesus and Queen of the Apostles. I am confident that by her intercession she will assist the Church in the Philippines—Jesus Christ the salvation of Asia and the eternal light of the world.

9. The joy of this meeting is increased by the presence of the *other Asian Bishops*—all of you united in this common mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ.

We are rightly gratified by the awareness that exists in the Church today—thanks to the action of God's Spirit in our times—of the need to bring the Gospel to bear upon all cultures, to make it incarnate in the lives of all peoples, to present the Christian message in a way that is ever more effective. The goal is a noble one, a delicate one; it is a goal to which the Church is firmly committed. Indeed, on the opening day of the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII announced that the Council's principal aim was to ensure "that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught" (October 11, 1962).

In all your efforts, my brother Bishops, to pursue this aim throughout the postconciliar period, be assured of the support of the universal Church, which embraces every nation under heaven and yet proclaims the same Christ to every people and to every generation. Be mindful above all of the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit, who alone can stir up the new creation. For this reason Paul VI could declare that "techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit ... It must be said that the holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization: it is he who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel and it is he who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood"<sup>[17]</sup>.

It is to the Holy Spirit that we turn humbly to ask that our mission as evangelizers be fruitful for the Kingdom of God and for the glory of the name of Jesus : *Veni Sancte Spiritus! Veni Sancte Spiritus!*

[1] 1 Cor 2:5.

[2] Acts 20:27.

[3] 1 Cor 9:16.

[4] Cf. Mt 16:16.

[5] Cf. Rom 10:18.

[6] Cf. Rom 9:5.

[7] Gal 2:2.

[8] *Gal* 2:10.

[9] *Acts* 10:38.

[10] *Acts* 6:4.

[11] *Is* 51:1.

[12] *Acts* 16:9.

[13] *Mk* 3:14.

[14] Cf. *1 Pt* 5:4; 2:25.

[15] *1 Pt* 5:3.

[16] *Mt* 28:20.

[17] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75.

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