



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE PHILIPPINES,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AUSTRALIA AND SRI LANKA

10th WORLD YOUTH DAY

**HOLY MASS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 4th CENTENARY
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MANILA, AND THE DIOCESES OF CEBU,
CACERES AND NUEVA SEGOVIA**

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

*Philippine International Convention Center, Manila
Saturday 15 January 1995*

"Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matth 28, 18-19).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. These words from today's Gospel take on a special meaning in the context of the Jubilee which, together with the World Youth Day, the Church in the Philippines is celebrating. Four hundred years ago, *in 1595, the first Ecclesiastical Province was set up on these Islands: the Archdiocese of Manila and the Dioceses of Cebu, Caceres and Nueva Segovia.*

I greet the whole Filipino people, wonderful Filipino people. I greet all their Pastors. I thank Cardinal Sin for these kind words of welcome. I greet also His Excellency President Ramos and the Authorities.

The establishment of a Metropolitan Church in the Philippines bore witness to the fact that *the work of the first missionaries had borne abundant fruit.* The process of planting and building up the Church had already taken place in other parts of the world, especially in the European countries. In the case of my own Poland, it had taken place in the year 1000. Later, the same thing

happened in the countries of South America, Central America and North America. So it happened and continues to happen in Africa, in Australia and throughout Oceania, and on the continent of Asia. All this has a meaning that is not just a question of ecclesiastical administration. *The Church is a living body*. Like a living body, at a certain point she reaches a stage of *maturity* which makes it possible for a particular Church to give life to other Churches like itself.

Plantatio Ecclesiae. Misterium plantationis Ecclesiae. Paulus plantavit; Apollo rigavit. Deus autem incrementum dedit. I see that Filipino people are understanding very well Latin.

2. Four hundred years ago the Church in Manila became the Metropolitan See for the Church in Cebu, Caceres and Nueva Segovia. In the space of these four centuries *the number of the particular Churches in the Philippines has greatly increased*. Those first four Dioceses have each become a Metropolitan See, and alongside them numerous particular Churches have developed and continue to grow. In this part of the world *it is the Philippines which enjoys the greatest wealth of ecclesial life. Plantatio fecunda, fecundissima.*

Dear brothers and sisters, we have *come together here to give thanks to God* precisely for this grace, great grace of God. Not just you who have come from all over the Philippines, but also representatives of the Churches throughout Asia and the Far East. As I see also many Cardinals from Europe, and from Africa, from Asia. All together we greet the delegates of the other Christian Churches and Communities, as well as the representatives of other religions. For me it is a great joy to be here with you on this day, as Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter. Peter was the first in "plantatio Ecclesiae" in Rome and from Rome. "Plantatio Ecclesiae" in Manila, in the Philippines, Peter, Successor of Peter, also a grace. Together let us praise God for the grace of this Four Hundredth Anniversary. In one great chorus let us commend the Church in the Philippines and the whole Nation to God's Providence: *"Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance"* (Ps. 28 (27), 9).

In the midst of our joy on this occasion we cannot forget our Filipino brothers and sisters who live in difficult social and economic conditions, and those who are trying to recover from the natural disasters which have occurred with a certain frequency in recent times. I am thinking in particular of the *victims of the Pinatubo eruption and its after-effects*. I ask God to strengthen and comfort those who have lost their loved ones, their homes, their livelihood, and I earnestly hope that their appeals for further help and solidarity will not go unheard. And I think also there are many Filipinos in Rome, in Italy and through the world. I greet all of them. They are also the same inheritance. They are also celebrating this centenary.

3. Today, we cannot fail to remember *the first messengers of the Good News* who came to these Islands. Their origins were in Spain, for it was above all *the Iberian Peninsula which gave rise to that great missionary thrust* which followed the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. At that same time other brave explorers were travelling south and east, round Africa by way of the Cape of Good Hope, through the Indian Ocean, towards Asia and the Far East. Those remarkable voyages opened up for the Church vast new horizons for her evangelizing mission. It was in that context that the evangelization of the Philippines began.

It is significant that *the first Episcopal See in Manila* was originally attached to Mexico, in spite of the enormous distance involved in crossing the Pacific Ocean. Clearly that was a temporary measure, until the first independent Ecclesiastical Province was erected in the Philippines, precisely in 1595. After hesitation at the beginning, the missionary Church of that early period gradually became more truly Filipina as the number of native-born priests and Bishops increased.

Looking back today on that past, we must express our thankfulness to God for those pioneers who laid the foundations of the Church in this land: for the Augustinians who were the first to arrive, followed by the Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Dominicans and the Augustinian Recollects. The early missionaries who sought to defend the native peoples from the abuses of the *conquistadores* and *encomenderos* found a vigorous leader in the Dominican Fray Domingo de Salazar, the first Bishop of Manila. As early as 1582 he summoned the first Synod, which decided many questions regarding conquest, settlement and administration in accordance with the principles of the faith and Christian morality.

A wonderful process, a wonderful history, history of the Church, history of salvation, history of Filipino people. All of us, all of you Filipinos today, you are the inheritance, the successors in this great process, great process.

4. Saint Paul writes to the Ephesians: "May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, grant you *a spirit of wisdom and insight... that you may know the great hope to which he has called you...* and the immeasurable scope of his power in us who believe" (*Eph.* 1, 17-19). What Saint Paul wished for the Christian community at Ephesus is what I wish today for the Catholic people of the Philippines. I pray above all that you will appreciate ever more fully the grace of your Christian vocation as explained by the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Church (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 40).

This vocation has its beginning and source in Christ himself. All Christians live by the inexhaustible riches given to us in him. Saint John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic who lived just at the time when the evangelization of the Philippines was getting underway, reminds us of this fact. He wrote in the *Spiritual Canticle*: "(Christ) is like a rich mine with many recesses containing treasures, and no matter how men try to fathom them the end is never reached" (Saint John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, st. 36). Christ is so rich!

In the work of the missionaries and in their service to the people, the power of Christ, Crucified and Risen, was being manifested – the power of Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the Father and who, as Redeemer and Bridegroom of the Church, works through her in the Holy Spirit. It is very important not to confuse the Church with some merely human or humanitarian organization. *The Church lives and grows in Christ and through Christ*. All her members, in their thoughts and actions, are called to bear witness to the living presence of the Redeemer.

5. The Father, as we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, "has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him thus exalted, head of the Church, which is his body" (*Eph.* 1,22-23). That is why, after his Resurrection, Christ sent out the Apostles with the words: "*Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth*" (*Matth* 28,18). This saving power of the Redeemer is what sustained the missionaries who came to the Philippines in the sixteenth century. This same power

is what has preserved the sons and daughters of your nation in living their lives as Christians, in forming Christian families, in educating your children in the faith. By doing all of this, your forefathers laid the foundations of the only predominantly Catholic country in this part of the world, a region which still presents an enormous challenge for evangelization. In time, children of this land, as priests and Bishops, took over full pastoral responsibility, while others filled the ranks of the congregations of men and women religious, so that the Church which is "the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its parts" (*Eph. 1, 23*) would be truly catholic and universal, but also truly immersed in the life and culture of these Islands.

6. *Today therefore is a day of great joy*: rejoice in great gratitude to the Lord. The Responsorial Psalm contains an appropriate invitation: "All you people, clap your hands, shout to God with cries of gladness... For the king of all the earth is God... God reigns over all the nations" (*Ps. 47(46), 2.8-9*). The faith which springs from the Gospel transforms the life both of individuals and of nations. For four hundred years the Church has served as a leaven and as a kind of soul for Philippine society, most of all by her healing and elevating impact on respect for the human person, and by the way in which she strengthens families and communities, and imbues everyday activity with a deeper meaning and reference to God (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 40). Inspired by their faith, Filipino Catholics have begun countless initiatives for the good of society, in the fields of education, healthcare and service of all kinds. Out of the Church's religious mission during these four hundred years there came a light and an energy which have served to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 42). *This is the source of our joy*. This is the source for our joy and our gratitude to the Lord, the Almighty Father. This is the reason for the Philippine Church's joy, visible in this celebration, with all the color and vitality of your culture and Christian traditions. *But this is also your task and responsibility*: to remain faithful to what has been handed down and to build on it, so that God's law will abide in your hearts and his blessings will increasingly be poured out on your nation.

A great boost to our joy is given by the young people of the *World Youth Day* who have come to Manila from every corner of the Philippines, from many parts of Asia and the Far East, and from the other continents. They are the sign and the confirmation of your living faith. My heart is going to all of them, to all the Filipino young men and women, and to all young men and women of the whole world, of so many countries of the world... European, Asiatic, Africa, America, North America, Latin America, Central America, Australia, all the continents.

7. The joy of the human heart springs from the presence of God in us, in our hearts. Isaiah writes: "All who... hold to my covenant I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer". *The spiritual joy of God's people in the Philippines has two fundamental points of reference: the house of prayer and the holy mountain*. First, the community gathers in "the house of prayer" (*Is. 56, 6-7*) – which is the home, or a chapel, a parish church or a cathedral – to celebrate the mysteries of our redemption and to profess the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith. From there God's pilgrim people go forth to ascend "the holy mountain": marching forward in hope towards the fullness of God's kingdom, all the time striving to make present and operative at every level of your personal and national life that kingdom of holiness, justice, peace and

solidarity. So two points: the house of prayer and the holy mountain, being together and ascending with Christ into heaven, into his kingdom. All that is inspired by the liturgical texts as of today's liturgy.

8. Filipino People of God: at every Mass you hear the call *to lift up your hearts: Sursum corda!*

Lift up your heart, holy Church, which in four centuries has built a solid dwelling place for God in these Islands! So numerous islands, Filipino islands, wonderful islands!

Whole generations have gone up from here to the Holy Mountain, where the God of glory dwells. The sign of this ascent are your *Filipino Saints*, beginning with Saint Lorenzo Ruiz whom I had the joy to beatify here in Manila and to canonize in Rome. They remain closely united with you in the Communion of the Saints. *They show you the way to God*, which is the fulfilment of the vocation of each and every human being.

Rejoice, Filipino people, holy Church of Manila, Cebu, Caceres, Nueva Segovia! Rejoice, every Filipino family, every Filipino Diocese and parish! Rejoice, for it has pleased the Father to give you the kingdom! This promise of the Father is fulfilled unceasingly through the power of Christ: to him be honor and glory for ever! Amen.

A long homily, but not too long for this occasion!

Mabuhay, to all Filipino people! Long live!

Very, very, very grateful for this celebration, for this great festivity of the Church in the Philippines.

Very grateful to almighty God!

Very grateful to all of you!

Viva Manila, Cebu, Caceres, Nueva Segovia!

Thank you very much!

Mabuhay!