



The Holy See

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

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LAY FAITHFUL
IN THE PARISH OF "MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS"**

*Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea)
Monday, 16 January 1995*

*Your Grace,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. With affection in the Lord I greet all of you, *Bishops, priests, seminarians, Religious, lay faithful and catechists, who have come here this evening to sing God's praises for the "great things" he has done in your land* (cf. Lk. 1:49). I am grateful to Archbishop Kurongku and the other Bishops here present, to the parish priest, to the Salesians, and to all who have worked so hard to make possible our *meeting here in the Parish of Mary Help of Christians*, in Gabutu, in the Archdiocese of Port Moresby.

Tomorrow the name of Peter To Rot – a son of New Britain and of the Tolai people – will be added to that glorious book, the *Martyrology*, the Church's record of those who have died for love of God and of his People. We should remember the words of Saint Augustine, who said that the Church in a nation "becomes the more fruitful the more it is watered by the blood of martyrs" (St. Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, 24.44). Nor can we forget at this time the many other men and women of these Islands – including those from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities – who gave their lives for the Gospel during the dark period of military occupation fifty years ago. The witness which they bore to Christ, even to the shedding of blood, is now a common inheritance of all Christians and therefore a "*convincing form of ecumenism*" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 37).

2. The fact that your first Blessed is not only a martyr but also *a lay catechist, a husband and the father of a family*, is very significant for the spiritual history of your people. When the early missionaries came to Papua New Guinea they recognized that the word of God would take root only when the people themselves became the active agents of their own evangelization (cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 18). Peter To Rot was one of those who came forward *to help plant the seed of truth* among his own people of the Tolai tribe. The priests at Rakunai encouraged and guided him, and he for his part fulfilled with devotion and commitment the responsibilities entrusted to him. Priests and catechists at the Mission Station of Rakunai worked together to build up the Body of Christ, and left a spiritual heritage for the coming generations to imitate.

3. Dear *Brother Priests*: your ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful, which is "directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1547). In the person of Christ, the "great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20), you exercise the sacred power which you received in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, in order to proclaim God's word, make present Christ's acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation, particularly in Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist, and to show his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock (cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 15). With gratitude to each one of you, and to all your brother priests who have not been able to come, I urge you never to lose sight of the great spiritual dignity and gift which you have received!

To the *Seminarians* I wish to recall that you must make Christ the Good Shepherd the centre, the model and the strength of your future lives and action as priests. Learn to live in Christ, and meditate constantly on the unfathomable riches of salvation in him (cf. Eph. 3:8), so that you will be able to proclaim the Good News to others. Be "rooted and grounded in love" (*Ibid.*, 3:17). Otherwise you will become nothing more than "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). It is *undivided love* for the Lord which will make your priestly ministry in the Church effective and allow others to see his unmistakable presence in you.

4. Dear *Men and Women Religious*: In Peter To Rot all Religious have a challenging model of fidelity. Here is a man whose "sincere gift of self" was like that of his Lord who "loved to the end" (cf. Jn. 13:1). Like his Lord, he was a "faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5). I urge you to live your religious consecration with generosity and unfailing fidelity to the demands of perfect charity. Each of your Religious families brings its own gifts to the Church's evangelizing mission. Your names are too many to mention, but I thank all the Congregations in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands for the testimony and fruitfulness of your consecration and your apostolate.

The *plantatio Ecclesiae* progresses in a very significant way through the selection and formation of worthy candidates to the Religious Life. I see many young Religious present: Be fully aware of the importance of your vocation not only for yourselves but for the future of the Church among the peoples of Melanesia. Listen attentively to the words spoken to your heart: "*Come, follow me*", says the Lord to each one of you.

I wish to say a special word of encouragement to *the members of the contemplative communities*. Through your continuous prayer and penance, in solitude and silence, you provide an *indispensable witness to the glory of the heavenly Kingdom* which is already "revealed to his holy ones" (Col. 1:26). Dear Sisters, pray for the Church, continue to pray for me; be guides to those seeking a deeper experience of God. Your way of life constitutes a reminder and challenge to the Church and to society: God is to be honoured above all else.

5. Dear members of the *Laity*: there is special significance in the fact that the first Blessed of Papua New Guinea was a *lay man and a catechist*. I hope that Peter To Rot will become a source of inspiration throughout the Church for all who work in the lay apostolate, especially for catechists who "represent the basic strength of Christian communities, especially in the young Churches" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 73).

The villagers of Rakunai were drawn to Christ and helped to follow him by the radiant charity and zeal of Peter To Rot. His *spiritual maturity* showed in his *apostolic maturity*. He paid particular attention to those who had become lukewarm in the practice of the faith or who had abandoned it. As a catechist devoted to the spiritual welfare of others – even in situations where he risked arrest and imprisonment – he went in search of the sheep who had gone astray, and did not rest until he had found it (cf. Lk. 15:4). How the young Churches of this part of the world need men and women of Peter To Rot's calibre! At tomorrow's Beatification I encourage you to renew your faith and your commitment. Remember: "*You are the light of the world... let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to the Father who is in heaven*" (Mt. 5:14, 16).

6. To all of you I say this: what I see before me is a great *hope for the Church*! Do not be discouraged about the future of evangelization! Do not hesitate to preach the Good News clearly and boldly, for there is only one true hope for humanity: Jesus Christ, the Word – made – flesh who dwelt among us (cf. Jn. 1:14).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, protect you and fill you with spiritual strength and courage, and guide your feet into the way of peace (cf. Lk. 1:79). Amen.

As you know I come here from the Philippines. I come here from Rome but immediately from the Philippines. The Philippines, the World Day of Youth, young people, young men and women. It was a wonderful experience. The sixth time, yesterday, Sunday, there was a big celebration, Eucharistic Celebration for all the participants of the day; about four million young people. And what was important was that there were not only Filipino young people but young people from the whole world, from all continents, from America north, south and central, from Africa, from Europe, different countries, from Asia, from different countries of Asia, different nationalities, and of course those from Australia and from Oceania were represented. The richness of languages, of cultures, and the same faith, and the same love and the same hope. In the spirit of this experience I come here to Papua New Guinea for tomorrow's beatification, and it is for me a great hope also and

great pleasure, great joy, to be among you. You are speaking different languages, you are speaking all English, Pidgin English. I learnt Pidgin English for my visit ten years ago. I was here. I celebrated a great Eucharistic celebration for the community of Papua New Guinea. This time I hoped to be able to go to Rabaul. I know that our brothers and sisters of this city, of this region, of this island, are suffering because of the volcanic eruption but we are spiritually united with them that they should be consoled throughout.

The missionaries among you also speak different languages. They speak your languages, even your languages, but they brought with them their languages. They speak English, they speak German (Gelobt sei Jesus Christ), they speak Italian (Sia lodato Gesù Cristo, sempre sia lodato), they speak Polish (Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus). That is the cultural richness of the old world and the young world. You are young like me (laugh). Even if you are not young as ethnic groups you are young as Christians, as Church. If one is young we have reason to address to him these words: Long Life! Long Life! to the young Church of Papua New Guinea. So many Christians, many baptised, many seminarians, many novices, many religious women and men, many priests and many Bishops of Papua New Guinea. For the Pope this improvisation is rather long. Now we should continue our prayer.