



The Holy See

MASS WITH THE FILIPINO IMMIGRANTS WHO LIVE IN ROME

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

First Sunday of Advent, 1 December 2002

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Your Excellencies the Ambassadors,
Brothers and Sisters,
Mabuhay ang Filipinas
[Long live the Filipinos].*

1. *"For you, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name"* (Is 63,16; cf. RSV). At the beginning of Advent, the liturgy invites us once again to savour the comforting message of God's fatherhood. The words from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah we have just heard take us to the heart of Jesus' teaching. To the direct request of his disciples: *"Lord, teach us to pray"*, he replies by encouraging them to call God by the loving name of *"Father"* (cf. Lk 11,1-4).

Yes, *God is our Father!* He takes care of us because we are the work of his hands. He is always ready to pardon repentant sinners and *to welcome lovingly* those who trust in his infinite mercy (cf. Is 64,4).

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Filipino Catholic Centre in Rome! I am thrilled to share *this consoling message* with you as we begin our Advent journey. I would have liked to visit you last 24 February and to celebrate the Eucharist in the Basilica of Santa Pudenziana on the Viminal Hill.

It was not possible, so today I cordially welcome you at the Vatican, thus resuming my regular meetings with the parishes and communities of our diocese.

2. With great affection I greet you and, through you, the many thousands of Filipino men and women living in Rome and in other cities throughout Italy. I greet the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishop for the central zone, who are constantly concerned for your pastoral care. I also greet your fellow countryman, Cardinal José Sanchez, Prefect emeritus of the Congregation for the Clergy, who honours us by his presence here today.

I likewise respectfully acknowledge the presence of their Excellencies, the Ambassadors of the Philippines to the Holy See and to the Republic of Italy, together with other Representatives of the Filipino community.

My cordial greeting also goes to the priests, to the men and women religious and to the lay faithful who in various ways *serve your large and lively community*. In a special way I greet your hard-working Chaplain, Father Alberto Mena Guevara. I thank him for his kind words at the beginning of this celebration and his introduction to the many activities taking place at the Basilica of Santa Pudenziana, which was entrusted in 1991 to the *Sentro Pilipino*. Just a few months ago he took over the rich legacy of pastoral care left behind by the much-loved Father Remo Bati after ten years of generous and faithful service to the community. I also thank Mr Exequiel Garcia and young Mark Angelo who spoke on behalf of all of you.

The Church's concern for the Filipino faithful can also be seen in *39 pastoral centres* located throughout the City where you can foster your own noble Christian traditions and give them new life, thanks to the liturgical and apostolic services offered there.

Continue on the path of faith and solidarity with one another to build the civilization of love

3. Dear Brothers and Sisters, hold fast to the rich cultural and religious heritage that is an integral part of your identity. Many of you have had the chance to find employment here in Italy and have attained a standard of living that enables you to help your family members at home. For others, however - and I hope that they are few - *your status as immigrants has brought you serious problems*, including loneliness, the separation of families, the loss of the values handed down from the past and at times even the loss of your faith.

I would like to renew to all of you, and in particular to the many women present here, the words of encouragement which we heard in today's Liturgy: *Do not lose heart!* We must not grow weak in faith, for the Lord is near. The fact that you are immigrants makes you all the more dear to Jesus who, as we recall during Advent, came on earth to save us.

Continue, then, with trust and determination, along *the path of faith and solidarity* so well expressed in the motto mentioned by your Chaplain, which calls you to "communion", "witness" and "the proclamation of the Gospel". The witness of an authentically Christian life will keep you united among yourselves and will continue to win you the respect and help of others. I ask those who employ you to welcome you and love you as cherished brothers and sisters in Christ. *All of us*

must work together to build the civilization of love.

4. *"Watch ... watch"*. This admonition that Jesus addresses to us in the Gospel (cf. Mk 13,33) is the basic message of the Advent season: *to be vigilant while waiting for the Messiah*. Let us remain alert, dear brothers and sisters, to be ready to meet the Saviour who comes to reveal to us the face of the heavenly Father.

May Mary, the humble Virgin of Nazareth, chosen by God to become Mother of the Redeemer, *make fruitful our prayerful and attentive waiting for the Redeemer. Amen!*

Mabuhay ang Filipinas [Long live the Filipinos].

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