



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PHILIPPINES

ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT

Monday, 19 November 1990 Dear Brother Bishops,

1. For the third time this year I have the joy of meeting a group of Bishops from the Philippines on their *ad Limina* visit. Your presence brings before my eyes the warm and friendly character of your people and their joyous living of the faith by which they have been regenerated in Jesus Christ to become "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pt. 2:9). In the communion which binds us together in the apostolic ministry, we must never cease to give thanks to God for his designs of loving mercy, made manifest in the holiness and generous service which mark the lives of so many of your priests, religious and laity. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (*Ibid.* 1:3).

2. In my meetings with the other groups of Philippine Bishops I referred to your pastoral leadership in helping your people acquire a deeper knowledge of the Church's teachings so that the message of the Gospel may continue to penetrate and uplift Filipino society. The challenge is particularly acute in the area of priestly formation. But it is also pressing as regards *the spiritual and doctrinal preparation of suitable lay leaders* whose special role it is to apply the truths and values of the Gospel to the realities of the economic, social and cultural life of the nation. The "evangelization" of a people's culture includes the external and popular expression of devotion in rituals of life based on religious motives, but it must go even further, to the very heart of human behavior, to a *clarifying of human problems in the light of Christ* and an interior personal renewal in the "new life" which has its source in the very Spirit of God. That new life is *life in the Body of Christ, which is the Church*. It embraces each individual who is baptized into the life of grace. But it is not a merely private matter. The ecclesial and catholic nature of the Christian life needs to be clearly presented to the faithful, especially in the face of contentious tactics used by organizations and sects with which there is generally little or no possibility of dialogue, and which are often a serious obstacle to ecumenical efforts. As Bishops, you understand that the proper response to the proselytizing activities of these groups lies in the genuine renewal of your own communities, whereby they become more fraternal, more caring about the real situation of their members, more lively in their love and fellowship, and more outgoing and witnessing in their profession of faith (Cf. *Sects or new religious movements: Pastoral Challenge*, n. 3. 1.). The "*National Catechetical Year*" which is now drawing to a close shows how completely you have taken to heart the task of fostering a richer and more organized program of instruction in Catholic doctrine. I encourage you to pursue the intent of this Year in other ways, by seeking to use all available resources in the enterprise of deepening the Christian formation of your people.

3. Another theme of my conversations with previous groups of your brother Bishops has been the grave threats to the traditional values of Filipino society, about which you yourselves have issued frequent statements and Pastoral Letters. This loss of values has become evident in an increase of personal and social turmoil which, in turn, can often be traced to *the serious difficulties being experienced by the family*. Your visit enables me to share your profound pastoral

concern for the state of the family and to confirm you in your desire to strengthen and defend it as the first and vital cell of a just and harmonious society. A careful meditation on the real state of married love and family life reveals something of the ineffable mystery of how God's grace takes root and manifests its power in the life of a people. I referred to this in the Apostolic Exhortation "[Familiaris Consortio](#)", when I wrote that: "the central word of Revelation, 'God loves his people', is likewise proclaimed through the living and concrete word whereby a man and a woman express their conjugal love. Their bond of love becomes the image and the symbol of the covenant which unites God and his people. And the same sin which can harm the conjugal covenant becomes an image of the infidelity of the people to their God..." (John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#), 12). Clearly, the more faithfully the sacramental grace of marriage is preserved and allowed to bear fruit, the more fully couples and families, and hence society, will reflect God's loving presence in their midst. Filipino society has been truly blessed by God with a keen sense of the family. Innumerable benefits have flowed from the warmth of human relations, the goodness and effective solidarity with others generated by a *tradition of strong family life*. Today, the *Church is called to defend this precious heritage*, especially because of the difficult circumstances of so many families in your midst. Your pastoral response to present difficulties will spring from the evangelical love that animates your ministry. To love the family means to appreciate and foster its values and capabilities. It means to identify the dangers and the evils that menace it, in order to overcome them. It means endeavoring to create for the family an environment favorable for its development. It is an eminent form of love to give back to the Christian family its reasons for confidence in itself, in the riches that it possesses by nature and grace, and in the mission that God has entrusted to it (Cf. [ibid.](#), 86). Because the well-being of the civil community depends on the strength of its families, it is to be hoped that, alongside the Church, a great coalition of institutions, including the Government, schools and the communications media, will support family life and "do everything possible to ensure that families have all those aids — economic, social, educational, political and cultural assistance — that they need in order to face all their responsibilities in a human way" (John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#), 45).⁴ Recently you published a Pastoral Letter regarding *responsible parenthood*. The Church's primary and overriding concern in considering the acceleration or deceleration of population growth is that God's will for the person and for the family be fully respected; that is, that everything be done within the parameters of freedom of conscience, the responsible decision of couples, and the principles of sexual and family morality. You are conscious of your grave duty to *defend these principles and to proclaim and promote the moral law regarding the regulation of population*. On the pastoral level, it is important that your teaching in this delicate area be clearly and adequately communicated to your priests, so that they in turn may enlighten married couples regarding their rights and duties. Catholics should not hesitate to defend publicly the Church's teaching about the primary role of married couples and parents in deciding matters regarding the generous acceptance of children. By so doing they are upholding the fundamental values of freedom and responsibility for the whole of society. At the heart of the Church's teaching on marriage and procreation, as well as at the heart of her response to the population problem, is her *immense confidence in the capability of married couples themselves to achieve a love that is fully mature and responsive to the truth of God's plan for them*. During my visit to Burundi last September, I again emphasized the primary responsibility of parents in regard to decisions about their family: "it is up to them to live as responsible and generous parents, to be open to having the children whom they desire to have and whom they feel they are able to raise. That presupposes the spouses' great respect for one another, self-control in their life of intimacy, a love which preserves a constant respect for woman in her capacity for being a mother" (John Paul II, *Homily at the Mass for the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Gitega in Burundi*, September 6, 1990). The Church has a "good news" to proclaim regarding marriage and the family, a teaching of hope and true love of which the world has great need.⁵ You are well aware that, as father and pastor, the Bishop is the one principally responsible for the pastoral care of the family. This is an area to which he must give time, personnel and

resources, and above all his own support and encouragement to all those who assist him in the family apostolate (Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 73). You will be careful not to overlook the fundamental importance of the spiritual aspects of this pastoral endeavor. You will make it your duty to promote family prayer and the frequent reception of the sacraments as the sure means of safeguarding and strengthening Christian family life. Among the practices of piety which the Church has sometimes singled out for special recommendation, I am pleased to recall what Pope Paul VI wrote concerning the family Rosary: "We like to think, and sincerely hope, that when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer the Rosary is a frequent and favored manner of praying" (Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 54; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 61). In a country such as the Philippines, renowned for its Marian devotion, you know from experience how such a practice leads to Christ and to a more committed Christian life.⁶ Dear Brother Bishops, the circumstances in which your local Churches are called to live and grow and expand are varied and difficult. In many cases poverty and violence reach extremes which seriously disrupt efforts to foster development and the search for a more humane existence. The common good is often subordinated to personal interest. Reconciliation and peace seem far from being achieved. Do not become discouraged at the size and seriousness of the task before you. "The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 10). With that confidence may the Church in the Philippines press forward "Like a pilgrim in a foreign land... amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until he comes... (overcoming) patiently and lovingly the afflictions and hardships which assail her from within and hardships which assail her from within and without" (*Ibid.*). May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Model of the Church, guide you in your ministry and give you courage to remain ever faithful to the "burden" which the Lord has placed upon your shoulders. "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). With my Apostolic Blessing. © Copyright 1990 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana