

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

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS**

*Apostolic Nunciature of Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea)
Tuesday, 17 January 1995*

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. On this memorable *day of the Beatification of the martyr-catechist Peter To Rot* it gives me great joy to address you and to express my affection in the Lord for each one of you and for the people of God committed to your pastoral care: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). Together with the whole Church in the glorious *Communion of Saints*, let us praise God the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for the gift of the new Blessed, and let us be confident that his courage as a martyr will inspire the Catholics of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands to be ever more steadfast in professing the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith, and ever more faithful in living the demands of the Gospel.

The Church is "God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9), whose Architect is Christ himself (cf. Mt. 16:18). Her foundations, the ground of her durability and solidity, are Peter and the other Apostles. We who by God's design have succeeded to the apostolic ministry are charged with sustaining and increasing the household of God in the Spirit (cf. *Christus Dominus*, 1-2). As *servants of the Gospel*, our principal task is to "*strive to excel in building up the Church*" (1 Cor. 14:12). To build up the Body of Christ in love entails both evangelization and a constant inner renewal of the Christian life. Our meeting here in Port Moresby gives me the opportunity to encourage you in fulfilling the tasks which the Lord has laid on your shoulders. It enables me to urge you to work together in ever increasing fraternal solidarity for the good of the Church in this "hour of grace" which we are living as we approach the Third Christian Millennium, "*that new springtime of Christian life* which will be revealed by the Great Jubilee, if Christians are docile to the action of the Holy Spirit" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 18).

2. The Year 2000 since the Birth of the Saviour is not meant to be an occasion for false enthusiasm or unreal expectations. Rather, because the measurements of time are imbued with the presence of God (cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 16), it can serve as an opportunity for consolidating the faith of your people through an intense programme of preaching and catechesis. If Christians and their communities are to grow stronger in faith, they must mature in their *knowledge of Christ and his mysteries*. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* can be a very effective aid in presenting the fullness of Christian doctrine faithfully and systematically. Sound preaching and catechesis are the best means of helping men and women to believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they may have life in his name" (cf. Jn. 20:31). In this, the heroic figure of Blessed Peter To Rot, *catechist and martyr*, is an outstanding model.

I am aware that in recent years there has been an *influx of new religious movements and sects* in this region. They thrive, at least in part, because some aspects of their activities fill the void left by the loss of traditional values and ways of living, a loss accompanying the massive changes in economic, political and social life occurring throughout Melanesia. I urge you to continue your pastoral efforts to meet this challenge. The best and most adequate response lies in enabling

every baptized Catholic to heed the exhortation of the First Letter of Peter: "Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pt. 3:15).

3. At the present time and during the coming decades, the Church in Melanesia will pass from being a predominantly missionary Church to one that is more and more indigenous. This is the normal pattern of the development of ecclesial life, and in the life of each particular Church it constitutes a very delicate moment. The *plantatio Ecclesiae* is the work of brave and dedicated missionaries – men and women – who gradually prepare the community, and especially Christian families, to produce the priests, Religious and lay leaders it needs. In this way, the Church becomes firmly rooted in a people's life and culture. This is a long and sensitive process, needing much patient wisdom and heroic effort. In thanking God for the missionaries, principally the members of Religious Communities, who have worked and continue to work with such dedication in this part of the world, you all realize that the support of priests and Religious from abroad will be needed for a long time to come. Through you I therefore appeal to the Congregations which have members in your local Churches to do all they can to maintain and even increase that presence.

I am aware of the difficult circumstances in which you and your priests exercise your ministry. In this context I wish to encourage you to remain close to your priests, helping them to "fan into a flame the gift of God" (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6) which they received at Ordination. *Permanent intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation* is necessary so that priests will be able to fulfil their spiritual service to God's People. This support is of special importance during the early years of priestly life. In these "decisive years" young priests "must benefit from a personal relationship with their own Bishop and with a wise spiritual father and from times of rest, of meditation and monthly recollection" (Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 93).

4. As the *plantatio Ecclesiae* advances and Institutes of Consecrated Life move into a new stage, their prayer, their faithful observance of the evangelical counsels and their fraternal life become more and more a requisite for the Church's witness to holiness. In the particular Churches, consecrated men and women must be increasingly esteemed for what they are rather than for what they do! When society shows signs of fragmentation and certain aspects of consumerism and materialism cause a decline in traditional values, *Religious must renew themselves in the light of the particular gift of their Founders and Foundresses*, a gift received from God and approved by the Church (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptionis Donum*, 15). Only in this way will their witness be truly prophetic, a constant reminder of the presence of God's kingdom in the world.

In a special way I urge you to foster the spiritual and ecclesial maturity of consecrated women, recognizing and promoting *their specific contribution* to the Church's life and mission. In many cases it is through their activities, carried out in close contact with the people, that the Church is felt to be lovingly present and the Gospel becomes genuinely incorporated into the fabric of a given society, a village or community. In order that this form of elevating and transforming "inculturation" may bring positive results, Religious themselves need to foster a genuinely Christ-centered spiritual life, as well as a serious and contemplative study of Sacred Scripture and knowledge of the teachings of the Magisterium.

5. Yes, in many different ways the Holy Spirit is ever building the Church into "the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16)! One of the principal channels for a deep and penetrating inculturation of the Gospel in a society is *the Christian family*, the fundamental nucleus of "the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). The deliberations and publications of your Conference show that you have taken the strengthening of family life as one of your *pastoral priorities*. Because this fundamental community of persons is not of man's making but originated "in the beginning", at the very dawn of creation (cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 15), the family must always be helped to rise to the level of the Creator's original plan: "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

In *Blessed Peter To Rot* the faithful have a *teacher of the holiness of marriage and of the family*, one who confirmed his preaching with his blood. He was a devoted husband who prophetically lived the Gospel injunction that spouses are "mutually subject" to each other "out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21; cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24). He was a caring father who "honoured" his children (cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 15). Blessed Peter's death was decided upon largely because of his unbending defence of the sacramental dignity of marriage. May the faithful always hear in your teaching an *echo of the voice of the Redeemer* – in your appeals to marry sacramentally "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39), in your recalling the values of fidelity and mutual love, and in your invitations to spouses to live the full truth of conjugal chastity. This is all the more important since marriage for the baptized has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament.

6. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate: thankful for "your partnership in the Gospel" (Phil. 1:5), I assure you of my heartfelt support. I pray for you and your co-workers in the Lord. Through divine grace and the maternal protection of Mary, you are building up the Church in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, shaping it into a *worthy dwelling place of God*. May God abundantly bless your ministry.

With affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and comfort in Christ the Lord.