

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

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF PETER TO ROT
FIRST BLESSED OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

*Sir John Guise Stadium, Port Moresby
Tuesday, 17 January 1995*

Ol brata na susa bilong mi, Tenkyu tru long bikpela welkam yupela I givim long mi hastede long ples balus. Mi lukim bilas bilong ol manmeri ol I welkamim mi, na bel bilong mi I kirap tru. Bilas bilong yupela ol pipel bilong Papua Niugini I nais moa moa yet.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"Rejoice... insofar as you share Christ's sufferings" (1Pt. 4: 13).

1. Today, the People of God in Papua New Guinea repeat these words of the Apostle Peter with fervent hearts. You rejoice because the Universal Church recognizes that your fellow countryman, *Peter To Rot*, shared Christ's sufferings to the point of martyrdom and has been found worthy of being numbered among the Blessed.

With the joy which this occasion brings, *I greet the People of God in Papua New Guinea*. I thank Archbishop Kurongku and the whole Archdiocese of Port Moresby for the warm welcome given to me. Archbishop Hesse and the Catholic community of Rabaul would have liked this Beatification to be held in the place where Blessed Peter To Rot lived and was martyred. With love and solidarity, my thoughts turn to all the inhabitants of New Britain – those present here and the great majority unable to attend – who have been affected by the recent volcanic eruption. I gladly greet all my Brother Bishops, all the priests, Religious and laity of this land and of the Solomon Islands, and those who have come from other Islands of the vast Pacific, and from Australia and New Zealand. I extend my hand in friendship to our Brothers and Sisters of other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. I thank all the civil authorities for their presence at this solemn ceremony.

The *first Blessed* from *Papua New Guinea* begins a new epoch in the history of the People of God in this country. Martyrdom has always been a part of the pilgrimage of the People of God through history. In the Old Testament Reading of this Mass, the Second Book of Maccabees tells the *story of Eleazar's unflinching fidelity* to the holy law of God, his readiness to accept death rather than compromise with evil. Faced with the supreme test, he says: "Although I could have escaped death, I am not only enduring terrible pain in my body from this scourging, but also suffering it with joy in my soul because of my devotion to God" (Mk. 6: 30).

Likewise in the New Covenant. Beginning with the deacon Stephen (cf. Acts. 7: 54-60) and the Apostle James (Ibid. 12:1-2), the New Testament records that a "great cloud of witnesses" (Cf. Heb. 12: 1) gave their lives in order to profess their faith in Christ and their uncompromising love for him. And down the centuries, glorious pages of the Church's Martyrology have been written *in every generation*. The sons and daughters of many Churches in Asia are inscribed in "the archives of truth written in letters of blood" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2474). I myself have had the grace of canonizing the Korean and Vietnamese Martyrs. We can also recall Saint Paul Miki and

his Companions, martyred in Japan; Lorenzo Ruiz, the first saint of the Philippines; and Saint Peter Chanel who suffered a martyr's death in the Islands of the Pacific.

Throughout this century the "faithful witnesses" have been present in great numbers (Cf. John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 37). The wars, concentration camps and intolerance of our own time have yielded *a rich harvest of martyrs* in many parts of the world! Also in Papua New Guinea where there were many Christians belonging to the various Churches and ecclesial communities who gave the supreme witness. Today your fellow countryman, Peter To Rot, an honoured son of the Tolai people, a catechist from New Britain, has been listed among them. The Church everywhere sings praise to God for this new gift.

2. The sufferings caused by *the recent tragic eruption have drawn the Christian community of New Britain closer to the Martyr Peter To Rot*. In God's saving plan, "suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption" (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 27). Just as the Lord Jesus saved his people by loving them "to the end" (Jn. 13: 1), "even to death on a cross" (Cf. Phil. 2: 8), so also he continues to invite each disciple to suffer for the Kingdom of God. When united with the redemptive Passion of Christ, human suffering becomes an instrument of spiritual maturity and a magnificent school of evangelical love.

3. Blessed Peter understood the value of suffering. Inspired by his faith in Christ, he was a devoted husband, a loving father and a dedicated catechist known for his kindness, gentleness and compassion. Daily Mass and Holy Communion, and frequent visits to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, sustained him, gave him wisdom to counsel the disheartened, and courage to persevere until death. In order to be an effective evangelizer, Peter To Rot studied hard and sought advice from wise and holy "big men". Most of all he prayed – for himself, for his family, for his people, for the Church. His witness to the Gospel inspired others, in very difficult situations, because he lived his Christian life so purely and joyfully. Without being aware of it, he was preparing throughout his life for his greatest offering: by dying daily to himself, he walked with his Lord on the road which leads to Calvary (Cf. Mt. 10: 38-39).

4. During times of persecution the faith of individuals and communities is "*tested by fire*" (1Pt. 1: 7). But Christ tells us that there is no reason to be afraid. Those persecuted for their faith will be more eloquent than ever: "*it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you*" (Mt. 10: 20). So it was for Blessed Peter To Rot. When the village of Rakunai was occupied during the Second World War and after the heroic missionary priests were imprisoned, he assumed responsibility for the spiritual life of the villagers. Not only did he continue to instruct the faithful and visit the sick, he also baptized, assisted at marriages and led people in prayer.

When the authorities legalized and encouraged polygamy, Blessed Peter knew it to be against Christian principles and firmly denounced this practice. Because the Spirit of God dwelt in him, he fearlessly proclaimed *the truth about the sanctity of marriage*. He refused to take the "easy way" (Cf. *ibid.* 7: 13) of moral compromise. "I have to fulfil *my duty as a Church witness to Jesus Christ*", he explained. Fear of suffering and death did not deter him. During his final imprisonment Peter To Rot was serene, even joyful. He told people that he was ready to die for the faith and for his people.

5. On the day of his death, Blessed Peter asked his wife to bring him his catechist's crucifix. It accompanied him to the end. Condemned without trial, he suffered his martyrdom calmly. Following in the footsteps of his Master, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1: 29), he too was "*led like a lamb to the slaughter*" (Cf. Is. 53: 7). And yet this "grain of wheat" which fell silently into the earth (Cf. Jn. 12: 24) has produced a harvest of blessings for the Church in Papua New Guinea!

Yes, the wisdom of the Gospel tells us that eternal life comes through death, and true joy through suffering. In order to understand this we must judge by God's standards and not by man's (Cf. Mt. 16: 23)! This morning's Reading from the First Letter of Peter says: "*Happy are you when you are insulted for the sake of Christ, for then God's Spirit... has come to rest on you*" (1Pt. 4: 14). These words apply to Peter To Rot. They describe the particular "blessedness" of those "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5: 9) who suffer martyrdom in every age of the Church. In God's eyes, *those persecuted* for their fidelity to the Gospel are *truly blessed*, for their "reward is great in heaven" (Mt. 5: 12).

6. I am particularly happy that there are *many catechists here from all over Papua New Guinea*. You, dear catechists, are "direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers... the basic strength of Christian communities" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 73). From the beginning, the work of lay catechists in Papua New Guinea has made "an outstanding and indispensable contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church" (*Ad Gentes*, 17). In the name of the whole Church I thank you for the sacred work which you are doing. May God reward and bless each one of you.

The Martyr's example speaks also to *married couples*. Blessed Peter To Rot had the highest esteem for marriage and, even in the face of great personal danger and opposition, he defended the Church's teaching on the unity of marriage and the need for mutual fidelity. He treated his wife Paula with deep respect and prayed with her morning and evening. For his children he had the utmost affection and spent as much time with them as he could. If families are good, your villages will be peaceful and good. Hold on to the traditions that defend and strengthen family life!

7. *A special greeting to the many young people who are here*. Blessed Peter is a model for you too. He shows you not to be concerned only about yourselves but to put yourselves generously at the service of others. *As citizens*, you should feel the need to work to improve your country, and to ensure that society develops in honesty and justice, harmony and solidarity. *As followers of Christ* guided by the truths of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church, build on the solid rock of faith and do your duty with love. Do not be afraid to commit yourselves to the task of making Christ known and loved, especially among the many people of your own age, who make up the largest part of the population.

8. For the Church in Papua New Guinea the Beatification of Peter To Rot opens a new period of *Christian maturity*. *In the history of the local Church in any country*, the first native-born martyr always marks *a new beginning*. For this reason, as Pastor of the universal Church, I have fervently desired to share this great joy with you and join you in *giving thanks to God for the first Blessed of Papua New Guinea*.

To the intercession of the new Blessed I wish to commend with special affection *the people of Bougainville*, who for six years have been suffering the tragic consequences of violence, war and destruction. I extend a special word of encouragement to Bishop Gregory Singkai and the Church in Bougainville, who are bearing a heavy physical and spiritual burden. I earnestly appeal to all sides in this dispute to negotiate a settlement in a spirit of goodwill and constructive openness. I pray that the discussions which have recently been initiated will soon lead to a just and lasting peace, with respect for the legitimate aspirations and rights of all concerned. May reconciliation and harmony once more prevail, so that the reconstruction which all yearn for can begin.

To the people of New Britain, the fellow countrymen of Blessed Peter To Rot, Martyr-catechist of Rakunai, I repeat the words of the Letter of Peter: "*Rejoice... insofar as you share Christ's sufferings*" (1Pt. 4: 13). Your recent tragedy has made you like your Martyr, different in the kind of suffering you have had to undergo, but like him configured to the Passion and Death of the Lord. The crucified Jesus is the sign of *God's unfailing love for every one of his children, for each and every one of you*.

Pidgin:

Mi laik bai yupela i tingim Peter To Rot oltaim. Yupela i mas tingting oltaim long bilip bilong em; yupela i mas tingting oltaim long famili laif bilong em; yupela I mas tingting oltaim long wok bilong em. Bikos Peter To Rot I soim rot long yumi. Em I soim rot long yumi olgeta, tasol moa yet long ol famili bilong PAPUA NIUGINI na long ol yut na long ol manmeri ol I autim tok bilong God long ol pipel.

Yupela amamas! Olgeta wari bilong yupela i ken tanim i go kamap amamas gen. Amen.

English translation:

(I want you to remember Peter To Rot always. You must think always of his faith; you must think always of his life in the family; you must think always of his work as a catechist. Because Peter To Rot shows us the way. He shows the way to all of us, but especially to the families here in PAPUA NEW GUINEA and to the youth and to all those men and women who preach the word of God to the people.
Rejoice! May your sadness be turned into joy! Amen.)

My brothers and sisters from Papua New Guinea, from the Solomon Islands, I share deeply with you in this beatification. The first Beatus from your country, from your people, from your Church. My congratulations to each and everyone of you, to the Bishops, to the priests, missionaries, catechists, to all the catechists, a great feast of all the catechists everywhere in the world – your families... And God bless you and your families and your catechists and all of you, everyone of you, the Church and the society.

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ!

Merci!

Thank you very much!