

Congregazione dei Rogazionisti

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Prot. No. 101/21

Subject: 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines

Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. (Mt 10, 8b)

To: Most Rev. Fr. Orville Cajigal
Provincial Superior
Saint Matthew Province
PARANAQUE

The Rogationist Circumscriptions

The Rogationist Communities

Cc: The Family of the Rogate

Dearly Beloved,

I welcome with great joy the Jubilee Year of 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines. As I express my cordial closeness to the beloved Saint Matthew Province, I would like to invite the whole Congregation and the Family of the Rogate to join in remembering this milestone in the life of the Church and for our Religious Family.

The theme of the Jubilee, *Gifted to Give*, chosen by the Philippine Bishops' Conference, highlights the gift of faith, the sense of gratitude for it, and the mission to share it.

Pope Francis recalled this in his message to the Church in the Philippines for the occasion: "During this jubilee year, let the words of Jesus guide you: 'Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give' (Mt 10:8). These words are an invitation to thank God for all those who handed on the faith to you. I myself can testify that you know how to hand on the faith; it is something you do very well, whether in your own country or abroad. Be grateful for the gift of faith. Thank God for the people who gave you the faith and for all those to whom you will pass it on in turn. Renew your enthusiasm for evangelization. Reach out to others and bring them the hope and joy of the Gospel."

By the design of Providence, this event falls during the Easter season. Historical evidence tells us of the first important stages of this beginning: March 31, 1521 - Easter Sunday. The first recorded celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Philippine soil, on the island of Limasawa, presided over by the chaplain of the ship, Fr. Pedro Valderrama. April 14, 1521 - Third Sunday of Easter. The first baptism recorded in the Philippines was officiated to Rajah Humabon, the King of

Sugbo (Cebu) (Carlos), his wife Humamay (Juana), and family members. And in the succeeding eight days, about 800 inhabitants of the island and neighboring islands received baptism. The Circumnavigator Ferdinand Magellan gifted Queen Juana the statue of the *Santo Niño*, which is now venerated in the Basilica of *Santo Niño* in Cebu. As a practice the explorer Magellan did in his expeditions, he also ordered to plant in the island of Cebu a wooden cross, now believed to be conserved in a chapel near the Basilica of the *Santo Niño*.

The beginning is represented by the cross, planted by the visitors with the welcoming assistance of the local inhabitants; a cross, a symbol of condemnation and dishonorable defeat, becomes a "glorious cross", a sign of victory, redemption, and greater love, that is, the gift of life for brothers and sisters.

The Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines issued for the event recalls all this.

It recalls the invitation received from the Pope to be "a Church that loves the world without judging, a Church that gives herself to the world. (...) You have received the joy of the Gospel ... and this joy is evident in your people ... in your eyes, in your faces, in your songs, and in your prayers... in the joy with which you bring your faith to other lands."

The Bishops then reported the words of one of their distinguished spokesperson, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, who confirmed the Holy Father's message by saying: "Let us thank God for the bearers of the gift in these 500 years." Among these, he cited the "pioneer missionaries, religious congregations, clergy, grandparents, mothers and fathers, teachers, catechists, parishes, schools, hospitals, orphanages, peasants, workers, artists, and the poor whose wealth is Jesus."

To remember means to bring back the events of the past with historical fidelity and to try to read and decipher them in their complexity. The Philippine Bishops' Conference does not shy away from this duty. It recalls that the expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan, in an unexplored path and full of dangers of various kinds, aimed to open a new commercial route and had no missionary purpose.

Those men of the sea and mercenaries landed in the Philippines exhausted by the long journey and fearful "as hapless strangers in dire need of shelter". Their dread turned to wonder when they saw themselves welcomed in peace and cared for in everything as brothers. The occasion of Easter, that those men, accompanied by the chaplain Fr. Pedro Valderrama, wanted to celebrate, became an opportunity to make the Christian faith known to the natives.

Thus, there was an ideal exchange of gifts: On the one hand, the presentation of an unknown religion that preached the love of God. On the other hand, the witness of generous and caring hospitality, full of spiritual values that constitute the natural environment for the acceptance of faith.

Unfortunately, this climate of peaceful fraternity was soon damaged by the presence of evil, selfishness, and hatred. As the Pastoral Letter reminds us of the well-known gospel parable, the evil one sowed weed among the wheat. The cross

dripped with blood and at the same time, it transmitted the power of love that redeems, which is witnessed to and announced.

In the concluding part of his message, Pope Francis invites the Church in the Philippines to let itself be guided by Mary towards a new Pentecost:

"Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, was also with the apostles on the day of Pentecost, as they prayed and awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. After receiving the Spirit, the apostles went out to proclaim the gospel fearlessly to the ends of the earth. Mary is always there with all of you. She is the mother who never leaves our side. She has always accompanied you and now we ask her to intercede for a new Pentecost of the Church in the Philippines".

Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. (Mt 10:8).

Dear friends, as sons and daughters of Father Hannibal, we have freely received the gift of Rogate and we are called to give it freely to the whole Church. Forty-five years have passed since our Religious Family arrived in the Philippines on November 23, 1976, to give the charism we have received.

Once again, the welcome we had, from the clergy and the faithful, was unparalleled. We faced the hardships of the beginnings associated with the joy of the first fruits. The Lord has blessed us abundantly and this anniversary reminds us of the duty to continue to thank, praise, and bless the Lord.

The consistent growth of the Congregation in the Philippines and Southeast Asia is a great gift of the Lord. In this, he wanted to make use of the availability and generosity of so many of our confreres, who gave themselves to the mission with admirable zeal.

I would be tempted to list them all, but I just would like to remember only two, as representatives of all the others. These are two confreres who bear special witness to this great dedication: the Servant of God, Fr. Giuseppe Aveni and the young Fr. Diego Buscio, who brought his missionary dream to Heaven.

Soon after, you, dear Filipino confreres looked beyond your borders, giving the gift received. You have made yourselves available to collaborate during the beginning of the presence of the Congregation in India (1987), guiding it directly from 1991 to 2008; you have begun the presence of the Congregation in Papua New Guinea, South Korea, and Vietnam (2003), Indonesia (2004) and Australia (2015). At the same time, many of you have joined other Circumscriptions of the Congregation, an expression of generous and precious fraternal help.

I find many similarities between our Rogationist history in the Philippines and the history of the pioneering Religious Orders in the Philippines which made the archipelago the launching pad for the evangelization of the neighboring Asian countries from the 1500s onward. Many missionaries to Japan, China, and Vietnam departed from the Philippines. And many Asian Catholics and missionaries had their formation and apostolate in the Philippines. Some of them died as holy martyrs in the mission, such as Lorenzo Ruiz and companion martyrs (in Nagasaki, Japan), Pedro Calungsod (in Guam), Vincent Pham Hieu Liem and companions (in

Vietnam), and Andrew Kim Tae Gon (in Seoul, South Korea). In the mysterious ways of God's design, the Rogationist history in the Philippines of sharing the gift of the charism of the Rogate to Asia is tracing the same footsteps the pioneering missionaries had trodden 500 years ago. The Rogationist Saint Matthew Province no longer has simply a Filipino physiognomy but has consistently acquiring an Asian face, enriched by the confreres from Indonesia, South Korea, and Vietnam who in each own unique way announce and inculturate the gospel of the Rogate in diverse Asian contexts.

Indeed, dear confreres of Saint Matthew Province, you have taken to heart the challenges of Saints Pope Paul VI and John Paul II addressed to you when they went to the Philippines: be evangelizers and missionaries to your fellow Asians. And I would dare add: be missionaries beyond the Philippines and Asia; go to the whole world and joyfully proclaim the gospel of the Rogate.

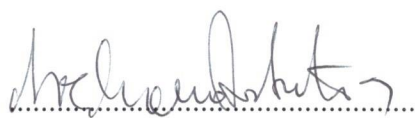
I cannot help but confess to each one of you, dear Filipino confreres, that my special bond with your land, your culture, your way of life, made my sense of belonging grow in me during the twenty-five years of being among you. In summing up, I must acknowledge that I have received more than I was able to give, but I must deeply reciprocate the affection I received. I also owe it to you when the Lord has called me to guide our beloved Congregation in these years.

On this occasion, on behalf of our Religious Family, I feel the duty to thank you for your missionary zeal and the strong sense of belonging that make you available to give what you have received.

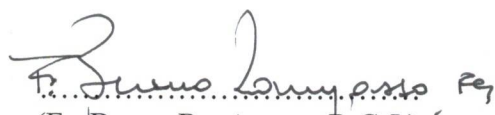
The journey made, with the increase of new children and the multiplication of the works of the apostolate, must open the heart to hope, but at the same time, it must lead all of you to grow in religious virtues, because only in this way can we continue to attract the blessing of the Divine Superiors.

I wish to part from you by making the greeting that Pope Francis addressed to you my own: "Continue to go forward. May Jesus bless you and bless all the Filipino people. May the Holy Virgin watch over you and may the *Santo Niño* be with you always".

With this wish I greet you all with affection in the Lord.


(Fr. Fortunato Siciliano, R.C.J.)
Secretary General




(Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, R.C.J.)
Superior General