

CBCP Pastoral Letter on the Era of New Evangelization

LIVE CHRIST, SHARE CHRIST

Looking Forward to Our Five Hundredth

Go and make disciples... (Mt. 28:19)

We look forward with gratitude and joy to March 16, 2021, the fifth centenary of the coming of Christianity to our beloved land. We remember with thanksgiving the first Mass celebrated in Limasawa Island on Easter Sunday March 31 that same blessed year. We remember the baptism of Rajah Humabon who was given his Christian name Carlos and his wife Hara Amihan who was baptized Juana in 1521. Our eyes gaze on the Santo Niño de Cebu, the oldest religious icon in the Philippines, gift of Ferdinand Magellan to the first Filipino Catholics that same year. Indeed the year 2021 will be a year of great jubilee for the Church in the Philippines.

We shall therefore embark on a nine-year spiritual journey that will culminate with the great jubilee of 2021. It is a grace-filled event of blessings for the Church starting October 21, 2012 until March 16, 2021.

How opportune indeed that on October 21 this year, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI will add another Filipino to the canon of saints of the Church, our very own Visayan proto-martyr Pedro Calungsod who gave his life for the faith on the morning of April 2, 1672 in Guam.

The canonization of Pedro Calungsod will take place under the brilliant light of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the twentieth year of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the declaration of the Year of Faith from October 11, 2012 until November 24, 2013 by the Holy Father. The XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops with the theme "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" will take place in Rome from October 7 to 28 this year.

FAITH AND EVANGELIZATION

All these events happening this year are bound together by the themes of "faith" and "evangelization". Evangelization indicates proclamation, transmission and witnessing to

the Gospel given to humanity by our Lord Jesus Christ and the opening up of people's lives, society, culture and history to the Person of Jesus Christ and to His living community, the Church.

This “**New Evangelization**” is primarily addressed to those who have drifted from the Faith and from the Church in traditionally Catholic countries, especially in the West. What we are being called to do by this task of “New Evangelization” in Asia is to consider anew “the new methods and means for transmitting the Good News” more effectively to our people. *We are challenged anew to foster in the Church in our country a renewed commitment and enthusiasm in living out the Gospel in all the diverse areas of our lives, in “real-life practice”, challenged anew to become more and more authentic witnesses of our faith, especially to our Asian neighbors as a fruit of our intensified intimacy with the Lord.*

WHAT WILL THIS ERA OF NEW EVANGELIZATION FOR THE PHILIPPINES CONSIST OF?

The task stands on four pillars:

First, fostering and fulfilling the “**missio ad gentes**”, as a special vocation of the Church in our country, effectively involving our laypeople, our “Christifideles” brothers and sisters; our priests and seminarians; men and women in consecrated life.

Secondly, “**bringing Good News to the poor.**” Again and again, Filipino Catholics coming together to discern priorities, have seen that the Church here must become genuinely “**a Church for and with the poor.**”

Thirdly, **reaching out** to those among us whose faith-life has been largely eroded and even lost due to the surrounding confusion, moral relativism, doubt, agnosticism; reaching out to **those who have drifted from the Faith and the Church, and have joined other religious sects.**

Lastly, awakening or reawakening in faith, forming and animating in Christian life our **young people** and youth sector groups, in both urban and rural settings;

A nine-year journey for the New Evangelization has already been charted climaxing with the Jubilee Year 2021: Integral Faith Formation (2013); the Laity (2014); the Poor (2015); the Eucharist and of the Family (2016); the Parish as a Communion of Communities (2017); the Clergy and Religious (2018); the Youth (2019); Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue (2020); *Missio ad gentes* (2021). These are the nine pastoral priorities of the Church in the Philippines.

In the time before us, we will focus on these dimensions of faith, evangelization and discipleship, one by one. And it is most propitious that as we received the faith 500 years ago, so with the Year 2021 we envision to become a truly sending Church.

In the face of a secularism which in some parts of our present world has itself become a kind of a “dominant religion”, in the face of the reality of billions who live in our time and who have not truly encountered Jesus Christ nor heard of His Gospel, how challenged we are, how challenged we must be, to enter into the endeavor of the “New Evangelization”! We for whom Jesus has been and is truly the Way, the Truth and the Life, -- how can we not want and long and share Him with brothers and sisters around us who are yet to know and love Him, who are yet to receive the fullness of Life for which we have all been created, and without which their hearts will be ever restless – until they find Jesus and His heart which awaits them?

May our Lady, Mary Mother of Our Lord, lead us all in our longing and labors to bring her son Jesus Christ into our time and our world, our Emmanuel – our God who remains with us now and yet whose coming again in glory we await.

Maranatha, AMEN.

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines:

+ JOSE S. PALMA, D.D.

Archbishop of Cebu

President

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