MESSAGE OF THE FIRST NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS

TO OUR BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

We, the participants of the First National Mission Congress, have gathered at Cebu City, from 27 September to 01 October in this Jubilee Year 2000 of the Lord’s Incarnation, in response to its convocation by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines. The beginning of the Third Christian Millennium, which our Holy Father named “the Asian Millennium,” has reminded us that nearly four billion Asians have not yet truly encountered the “living Jesus—our crucified and risen Lord” and that it is our joy and duty as Christians to proclaim His Name and His Gospel to all times, to all places, to all human situations and spaces which have not yet heard his Word of Salvation, to all human persons to whom His love has not been told. This is the challenge the Church has placed before us in fulfillment of a divine calling discerned in faith within our history as a people.

PART ONE

In the 16th century, explorers and missionaries from Spain brought us the Gospel and the Church. Our ancestors took so readily to the Christian faith that in the first evangelization of our people,
what was accomplished in some forty years—the Christianization of almost all our ancestral communities—has been called an achievement without equal in all of the Church’s mission history. Surely we may see in this the plan of God’s providence, a vocation of our people to faith, a vocation to become the people of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, “God’s own people” in this part of the earth.

This was, and is, a vocation also and necessarily to become a “Church-in-mission” for Asian peoples around us, and beyond; a vocation whose hour of grace, whose kairos now sounds for Filipino Christians, the hour of the Lord’s call and command, spoken directly to us: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all peoples....”

In this Congress, we have opened ourselves to this call, spoken to us by the Spirit of Jesus and by His holy Church. We accepted it, for all of “God’s people” in our country, whom we, representatives of every diocese, prelature, vicariate and church-circumscription in the Catholic Church in this country, represent in this Congress.

In this Congress, we have thanked God for this most precious gift: the gift to receive Jesus and to experience Him; the gift to belong to Jesus, to bear Jesus in our persons, to bring Jesus to all the world—this world that God loves so greatly and so unconditionally.

In this Congress, we have cherished and celebrated this gift; we have rejoiced in this gift because it is a call to live His life with Him, to love people as He has loved them, to serve them—especially “the little ones” with whom He has identified Himself—to spend our lives for them, so that they too “may have life and have it more abundantly.”

In this Congress, we have tried to hear, with all our minds and hearts, the words with which Jesus calls us:

“For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved by Him.”

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to proclaim release
to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

“May they be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me; ...may they become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me.”

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

We have tried to make these words resound within us, in prayer and desire, so that we may be obedient to them in love, so that we may say, HERE WE ARE, LORD JESUS, send us in your Name.

PART TWO

And thus, in this Congress, we wish to “receive and make ours” formally and explicitly, the Pastoral Letter of our Bishops, on the Church’s Mission in the New Millennium (5 July 2000). It is their own valuable meditation on our people’s providential vocation to Christian Mission, and their recognition of the present hour when this vocation comes to its time of full realization and fulfillment. Every part of this Pastoral Letter has much to teach us, and we will read it and reflect on it more and more in days to come.

With our Bishops we wish to affirm:

—that we believe that each of us, by baptism and confirmation, become true sharers of the mission of Jesus; every Christian is a missionary by worship and work, by word and witness, by our whole lives;

—that we believe that every Christian community—family, neighborhood, every parish and diocese; every covenant community, every BEC, even every Christian gathering, is and must be missionary, because it is part of the missionary Body of Christ on earth;
—that we believe that in fulfilling this vocation, we must “keep our eyes on Jesus,” walk His way of mission even as He walked it, in unfeigned service and lowliness of heart, in poverty, in powerlessness, in the path of His passion, death and resurrection, for all true mission is authentic sharing in His paschal mystery, in total loving and self gift;

—that we believe that this vocation-to-mission must be realized “AT HOME”—in our own country, wherever we live and play, work and suffer, in all of Philippine society, which at this time must be deeply, broadly and really re-evangelized, because the profound and rapid changes in our nation—affecting especially our young people—confront us with vast challenges to our Christian faith and our Christian life today;

—that we believe that we as Filipino Catholics are also sent as missionaries AD GENTES, to peoples around us, in the great continent of Asia and beyond, peoples who have not yet received the great gift of Jesus and the incredible Good News of His Gospel. We believe further that the hour of this sending is NOW, and we beg the Holy Spirit to come to us “as mighty wind and tongues of flame” so that we may go forth in His name and by His power with the courage and hope that are also His gifts.

CONCLUSION

We thank the Most Holy Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, for all that this Mission Congress has given us. And as we end we turn to our Mother Mary, Mother of the Lord, Mother of our people, Queen of the Apostles. She was the Morning Star of Evangelization in our country, in a way almost unique and unparalleled in Christian history. She, more than any other, led our ancestors to faith in her Son. It is she who, over the centuries, has more than anyone else kept our people despite trial and turmoil and turbulence, faithful to her Son. Now we ask her to stand beside us in this moment of decision and deed. We ask her, Mother of Asian peoples, to lead us
all, surely and safety to the Way, the Truth and the Life. He who is her Son, whose love embraced the world from the cross, and who now at the right hand of the Father, intercedes for us, until we, all humankind—find ourselves, one at last, in the kingdom of God, to whom be glory and honor through all the ages.

And so we pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, You are our Way, our Truth, and our Life. Strengthen our faith in your word, our hope in your promises, and love for you and one another. Make us living witnesses of faith to our own people, and give us the gift and the courage to proclaim your Name to those who do not know you, to dialogue with people of other faiths, and to build an earthly city of peace, justice and love.

Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life, on the day of Pentecost, you came to the disciples of Christ and accompany them with your power as they went about to preach the Gospel and baptize those who believe. Teach us to value the Christian doctrine and way of life, to be attentive to your word, and to be eager for your sacraments, so that as we set forth to proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ we may be worthy vessels of divine life. Amen.

For the Delegates of the First National Mission Congress

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