

A Free-For-All

"Our name is Peter." With these words Paul VI introduced himself to the members of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Likewise, the name "We are Peter" places, from the start, the Pope's visit to the Philippines in its true perspective. It is not Montini nor the head of the Vatican who will be coming to our land. It is Peter. Re-read his words in Geneva: "Scripture tells us what meaning Christ wanted to attribute to this name, what duties He imposes upon us: the responsibilities of the Apostles and his successors. But permit Us to recall other titles which the Lord wished to give to Peter in order to signify other charisms. Peter is the fisher of men; Peter is shepherd." From these words we can gather the meaning and the purpose of the Pope's visit to the Philippines.

"Feed my lambs... feed my sheep" (*Jn.*, 21:16-17) was the command of Jesus to the original Peter. A biblical scholar interprets this line thus: "Peter was consecrated by Jesus as universal shepherd. To establish his authority, even over those who will also be shepherds of souls, there is no need to look for the faithful in the lambs, and bishops and priests in the sheep. Lambs and sheep are almost synonymous here: both categories form part of Christ's flock. It is the whole flock that is subject to Peter's pastoral care" (Lagrance).

A simple glance at the schedule of the Pope's activities when he comes this month will reveal that the Holy Father intends to be true to his personality as the successor of St. Peter—Christ's Vicar on earth and the visible Head of God's Church. The Pope will have something significant for everyone, from the first to the last of the children of God.

He will address our rulers for as Vicar of Christ he was given the gospel, the fundamental Code of human society which should be adopted by all leaders throughout the world.

Of course, the role of the Pope in the deliberations of the Asian bishops will be paramount. His presence, without which

not even the College of Bishops may exist, is certainly to lend unparalleled authority to their various discussions.

Candidates for the priesthood will have the unique distinction of receiving the divine powers of the Eternal Priest from the hands of His Vicar on earth.

To religious men and women the Pope will explain, from the pastoral chair of the Manila cathedral, the meaning of their very *raison d'être* in the Church—religious sanctity as the Church's shepherds in service and obedience.

The studentry will also be addressed with words of exhortation, very timely in this time of universal confusion and skepticism.

But the most touching perhaps, of all the Pope's acts will be the spectacle of seeing innocent, children from the various nations of Asia receiving the "bread of angels" from the hands of the "sweet Christ on earth", as the Pope was called by St. Catherine of Siena.

Foremost nevertheless, in the Pope's intention will be the humble people of God, the poor and the destitute. For them will be apportioned a lion's share from the Papal visit to be realized in different acts which the Holy Father has from the start intended for them. Actually, "*pauperes evangelizantur*" has consistently been, from the days of the gospel, the most endearing of all Messianic signs. And the Church being eminently the Church of the poor makes the Pope's delight to be with his poor, the most noble souls of all, entrusted to him by Jesus' care.

The Pope will not forget, in these period of Ecumenism, our brethren still separated from us, especially here in the center of the mission lands with the unaccountable redeemable souls urgently claiming for laborers to be sent to his "harvest".

As can be gleaned, the Papal visit will be a happy sort of free-for-all affair. Faith, nevertheless, and the "gift of understanding" will be needed to profit from this significant event. The simple and the poor will not be lacking in this faith and understanding. But will the same faith and understanding be the lot also of the "wise and the prudent"?

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