

**PAPAL VISIT  
AND  
BEATIFICATION OF LORENZO RUIZ**

**Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

Pope John Paul II is coming to the Philippines. And we, your Bishops, wish to share with you our great joy and gratitude.

We recall with fondness and thanksgiving the visit of His Holiness, the late Pope Paul VI, in the course of his historic pilgrimage to the Far East and Oceania. His presence, his character, brought to our lives a message of peace and love, of renewal and salvation.

Soon, the present Vicar of Christ, Pope John Paul II, will walk among us. A second papal visit in so short a time is a privilege and honor few countries have had. We should appreciate this gift with a total readiness to open our hearts to his person, receive his words with reverence, and give practical response to his teachings.

His Holiness will come as a pastor to feed the Lord's flock, to evangelize the poor, and to strengthen the brethren in the faith. This he has been doing in a very human heartwarming manner, and this, we are certain, he will do when he is in our midst.

In Mexico and Poland, in Ireland and the United States, in Turkey and at the United Nations, he showed deep concern for all men, and a real understanding of the crucial problems of mankind. He is totally committed to working for world peace, for a just social order, for the upliftment of the underprivileged. He is working tirelessly for human rights and dignity, for a renewal of the Church through greater loyalty to truth and the love of God, and for a fraternal dialogue with peoples of various religious convictions. When he reaches our shores, we can expect the same pastoral concern for each one of us.

The highlight of the Holy Father's visit will be the beatification of a group of martyrs, one of whom is a Filipino, the Venerable Lorenzo Ruiz. Their martyrdom took place in Nagasaki, Japan, more

than three centuries ago. By proclaiming them Blessed, the Church wishes to emphasize and recognize anew the shining example of some of her members.

The forthcoming beatification will be the first to be held outside of Rome. This unprecedented event will focus the eyes of the world on our country, our people, and our way of life. The occasion, therefore, calls for soul-searching and self-examination.

The martyrdom happened more than three hundred years ago, but the event is nonetheless not without modern meaning. The persecution suffered by Christianity in various parts of the world, still speaks of a Church of silence, a Church of heroes, and a Church of weakings, a Church in hiding, and a Church of fraternal charity.

The candidates for the honors of the altars came from a variety of nationalities and professions, rendering their beatification ecclesial and universal. The group includes ten Japanese, four Spaniards, one Filipino, one Italian, and one Frenchman. Nine of them were Dominican priests, two Dominican laybrothers, two Dominican Sisters, and four laymen, among whom was Lorenzo Ruiz, a family man with three children.

Unknown until recently, Lorenzo is nevertheless a true hero of God and of the Philippines. His humble origin, his ordinary kind of life, his simple faith and his strong convictions make him easily identifiable with the rest of us Filipinos.

Born in Binondo, Manila, around 1600, an adverse fate made him leave his country with a group of missionaries headed for Japan, a mysterious land where they knew missionaries were not welcomed.

Imprisoned upon landing in the island of Okinawa, he was taken to Nagasaki on September 21, 1637 to stand trial for his life before a Japanese tribunal. But the threat of death did not make him flinch. When asked to confess his beliefs, Lorenzo declared: "I am a Christian, and this I profess until the hour of my death; and for God I shall give my life; and although I did not come to Japan to be a martyr, however, as a Christian and for God I shall give my life." Asked to deny his God, he answered without hesitation: "That I will never do because I am a Christian and I shall die for God, and for Him I shall give many thousands of lives if I had them. And so do with me as you please."

For being steadfast in his faith he underwent unspeakable tortures. First: spikes were driven under his fingernails; then gallons of water were forced to his stomach; finally, he was hanged up-

side down with his head in a pit. He remained in this position until he died three days later. This was on September 29, 1637. To frustrate the other Christians in the effort to recover the body and give it a decent burial, the executioners cremated the body and threw the ashes into the sea.

Because one of our countrymen suffered and died for the Christian faith, the Holy Father has seen fit to recognize this by coming to visit us. We should welcome him, not just with our traditional Filipino hospitality, but with hearts and souls open to the message of his spirit. Let us then prepare ourselves spiritually so that the coming visit will project not just the social dimension, but the larger aspect of renewal and reconciliation. Let us show our loyalty to the Holy Father by abiding with his teachings and by sharing his love for all mankind.

Finally, let us learn this lesson from the martyrdom of Lorenzo Ruiz: that while we need courage to die for our faith, we also must have the courage to live it from day to day, to keep it strong and unshakable in the face of the blandishment of a materialistic and secular world.

Let this visit not be a fleeting moment of religious fervor but an occasion for reflection. Let us rekindle in our hearts the missionary call that is ours, and resolve to build structures of love, justice, peace and understanding among men.

For the Catholic Bishops Conference  
of the Philippines:

JAIME CARDINAL L. SIN  
President

Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes  
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