

“UN POCO TARDE, PERO AQUI ESTOY”

By Fr. Javier Mexicano Ferrer, SX

Last January 15 to 19 the Philippines was blessed with the presence of our Pope Francis, a man of God.

In the Gospel of Matthew 11: 7- 8 Jesus asks, *“What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? ‘Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet...”*

Talking to our Philosophy students and friends around, I asked them, “What did you go out into Luneta Park, Mall of Asia Arena, Manila Cathedral, University of Santo Tomas and the



streets to look at? A Rock star? No, for sure. An artist? No....” I continued asking them, “What inspired you to stand firm under the rain and wait for long hours of your precious time? Why millions of people came out to the streets, children, youth, elderly, the cripple, and the sick?”

Then, different answers were presented, “We went to listen to a man of God, a prophet, a messenger of peace, our beloved Pope.” Our people did big sacrifices to be close to a man of God with a simple but deep smile.

PLACES VISITED BY THE POPE

The original motivation that brought Pope Francis to the Philippines was to mourn with the whole country the tragedy in the Visayan area caused by Typhoon “Yolanda” (Haiyan). Aside from the Visayan area his Holiness visited Manila Cathedral, Malacañang Palace, the Mall of Asia Arena, University of Santo Tomas and closed his visit with the solemn mass in Luneta Park. The Pope also came out of his itinerary to visit an orphanage, the sick and some Jesuit priests.

MESSAGE OF THE POPE

His Holiness addressed the faithful, political leaders, people of different religions, families, our youth and intellectuals. These are the main elements of his messages.

MALACAÑANG PALACE. Welcomed by President Aquino, the Pope’s message can be summarized in this paragraph, **“I hope that this... will challenge everyone, at all levels of society, to reject every form of corruption which diverts resources from the poor, and to make concerted efforts to ensure the inclusion of every man and woman and child in the life of the community.”** It was a prophetic message delivered to those who lead the country.

MANILA CATHEDRAL. As a prophet, the Pope met the religious leaders and, at the same time, presented the lifestyle that is coherent with the gospel values, **“Only by becoming poor ourselves, by stripping away our complacency, will we be able to identify with the least of our brothers and sisters.”** How to achieve this noble goal when many of us aspire for positions and possess more than the others?

MALL OF ASIA ARENA. Family groups and organizations went to this venue to listen to the Pope. They look for some spirituality that could help them stand firm in the middle of the storm of antifamily values. Pope Francis said, **“Families will always have their trials, but may you never add to them! Instead, be living examples of love, forgiveness and care.”** They heard the message; they came home happy.

TACLOBAN. Like during Typhoon Yolanda, it was raining and the wind was strong. Pope Francis began the Mass wearing a raincoat, and then he addressed the people gathered in the city airport. He said, **“[Cuando] yo vi desde Roma esta catástrofe, sentí que tenía que estar aquí. Esos días decidí hacer el viaje aquí. Quise venir para estar con ustedes, un poco tarde me dirán, es verdad, pero estoy** *(When I saw from Rome the catastrophe, I felt I have to be here. During those days I decided to travel*



here. I wanted to come to be with you, you may say I am a little late, which is true, but I am here).” Yes, he was late, but his presence meant a lot for our people. He offered his heart to those who still mourn the loss of their beloved ones.

PALO LEYTE. It was raining and the weather was not favourable, in fact the plane where cabinet members boarded suffered a problem during the take-off. To the clergy and religious gathered in Cathedral, the Pope said, **“I’m truly saddened because I had something prepared especially for you but let us leave everything in the hands of our Lady.”** All is left in the hands of God and the maternal presence of our Lady.

UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS. In the Pontifical University, the Pope addressed leaders of different sectors and the youth. In an impromptu speech during the encounter with the youth he said, **“Solamente cuando somos capaces de llorar sobre las cosas que vos viviste podemos entender algo y responder algo... Recién cuando el corazón alcanza a hacerse la pregunta y a llorar, podemos entender algo** *(only when we are able to cry because of what we have experienced we will understand something and answer to something... as soon as the heart is able to ask a question and weep, we will be able to understand something).*

LUNETAS PARK. Six to seven million people came from all over the country and many slept in the Park just to be able to participate in the Eucharist and listen to the Pontiff. I saw the youth, the elderly, and children in the Park. They were poor people, doctors, lawyers, professors; all of them were under the rain. The celebration was well organized by the local Church.



The messages of the Pope re-echoed what the late St. John Paul II said in 1995, the role of the Philippines is to be missionary. Pope Francis said, **“The Philippines... is the foremost Catholic country in Asia; this is itself a special gift of God, a special blessing. But it is also a vocation. Filipinos are called to be outstanding missionaries of the faith in Asia.”** We hope vocations to Christian life will flourish, especially to married life, priesthood and mission.

LEARNINGS and CHALLENGES

- **IT IS AN INTEGRAL PROCLAMATION.** The message of the Pope can be understood as an invitation to be **active members of transformation** in our families, in the school and society. Furthermore, the listeners were invited to fight corruption at all levels, in politics, religion, business and I would say, even in the school. When we teach the students to be honest during submission of projects and exams it is already a great teaching for the future leaders of our society.
The Christian call brings also the faithful to take care of the earth and its natural resources. If we are suffering natural calamities is due to the abuse of mother earth. Thus ecology is an integral aspect of salvation.
- **A LIGHT FOR OUR COMMUNITIES.** In the final ceremony at Luneta Park, Cardinal Tagle requested his Holiness to send the faithful as bearers of light. This request is not a mere symbolic action, but it is the wish of the Filipino Church to bring Jesus to all, as Mary did when she climb the Judean area and brought Jesus to the house of Zachariah and Elizabeth.
- **A MISSIONARY CHURCH.** If the Filipino nation is invited to bear the light, Jesus, to the world, they are turning into missionary agents of transformation. The Pontiff once again leads the people into the universal call, to bring Jesus to all, *especially to the little ones.*
- **RELIGIOUS LEADERS SHOULD ASSUME THEIR OWN PLACE.** I still remember the words of Most Rev. Gabriel V. Reyes, bishop of Antipolo, when he told all of us not to make our ministry *“the source of income.”* There is always the risk to use our vocation to get in touch with the powerful in order to get the latest gadgets, cell phones, laptops, tablets or fulfil our personal interests.
The Pope also challenged all of us to do what we are supposed to do, to be people of God, to remember who we are; I understand this as a journey to our simple roots of origin and travel with Jesus and faithful to mount Tabor in order to listen to God’s voice telling us that we too are *the beloved Ones.*

REACTION OF PEOPLE

The visit of the Pope was an especial event. This is the third time that a Roman Catholic Pontiff visits the country. The last time was in 1995 and I personally witnessed joy of our people in preparing the visit of St. John Paul II. When we sang **“Tell the World of His Love”** we indeed tried to be conscious of our Christian vocation and live out the gospel values. Every one learn from that special occasion.

People continue reflecting on Pope Francis' visit to the country. These are their reflections.

Vangie Cruz is a choir member in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Marikina City. She says, "The Pope has inspired me to become a person of compassion and humility especially with our brothers and sisters who are in need. I can become a better catholic by living out what the Pope has taught to each and every one of us not by feeling of obligation but by conviction and values."

Armando Carag is a lay ministers from a neighbouring parish, he said, "Yes Fr. Mex, even though I didn't go to any of the places where our dear Pope visited, I have followed him through TV. I have learned a lot from his Holiness. Now my assignment is to do more good deeds, to be a better person by opening my two hands to help those in need, the poor and dying; to take care of the disable but specially the children whom our pope loves so much."

Rowena Reyes was the coordinator of Family Life Ministry. This is her reflection, "I learned from Pope just to be simple. I also find his smile interesting; it seems to tell us to "Love One Another." The same is mentioned by Jesus in John 13. Every one watched the Smile on TV or met him in person; we felt the joy, the joy that we all know that once again God shows us his everlasting love... walang pinipili kahit sino ka pa (nobody was selected according to who the person was).

My assignment is to be compassionate and to live in humility. I know I don't need to be perfect in order to share God's love. It is a call to be simple and approachable thus becoming a better person, a better catholic."

Gemma Boreo is a Catechist from OLGP. This is what she wrote, "One of the things that the Pope taught us that really caught my attention is prayer. I'm inspired to be a person who has a personal and intimate connection with God. Though I was trained to pray always, since I started to face many commitments and activities, my personal prayer life was left out. I promise myself to dedicate more of my time in prayer because it is very important.

The long hours and waiting under the rain was indeed a very challenging experience. What inspired me is that I am not the only one sacrificing my time, effort and health but I am one with people eagerly to see the Pope and to feel God's presence in that event. This is indeed a great experience to cherish."

CONCLUSION

Pope Francis, yes, you were late, but your presence, your smile, and your way of living have enkindled the flame of the Gospel in the hearts of the faithful here in the Philippines. Pope Francis, yes, you were late, but the Philippines is always present in your heart... therefore, you were not late, because we are always present in your apostolic mission.

Thank you for helping us to live out our Christian faith with a smile.