

PREPARED AND UNDELIVERED HOMILY FOR THE MASS IN TACLOBAN

What words of consolation we have just heard! Once again, we have been told that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Savior, our high priest who brings us mercy, grace and help in all our needs (cf. Heb 4:14-16). He heals our wounds, he forgives our sins, and he calls us, as he did Saint Matthew (cf. Mk 2:14), to be his disciples. Let us praise him for his love, his mercy and his compassion. Let us praise our great God!

I thank the Lord Jesus that we can be together this morning. I have come to be with you, in this city which was ravaged by Typhoon Yolanda fourteen months ago. I bring to you the love of a father, the prayers of the entire Church, the promise that you are not forgotten as you continue to rebuild. Here, the strongest storm ever recorded on earth was overcome by the strongest force in the universe: God's love. We are here this morning to bear witness to that love, to its power to transform death and destruction into life and community. Christ's resurrection, which we celebrate at this Mass, is our hope and a reality which we experience even now. We know that the resurrection comes only after the cross, the cross which you have borne with faith, dignity and God-given strength.

We come together above all to pray for those who died, those who are still missing and those who were injured. We lift up to God the souls of the dead, our mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, family, friends and neighbors. We can be confident that, in coming into the presence of God, they have encountered mercy and peace (cf. Heb 4:16). There remains much sadness because of their absence. For you who knew and loved them – and love them still – the pain of losing them is real. But let us look with the eyes of faith to the future. Our sadness is a seed which will one day bear fruit in the joy which our Lord has promised to those who trust in his words: "Blessed are you who mourn, for you will be comforted" (cf. Mt 5:4).

We have also come together this morning to give thanks to God for his help in time of need. God has been your strength in these very difficult months. There has been great loss of life, suffering, and destruction. Yet we are still able to gather and to thank him. We know that he cares for us, that in Jesus his Son, we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with us (cf. Heb 4:15), who suffers with us. God's compassion, his suffering with us, gives eternal meaning and value to our struggles. Your desire to thank him for every grace and blessing, even when you have lost so much, is not only a triumph of the resilience and strength of the Filipino people; it is also a sign of God's goodness, his closeness, his tenderness, his saving power.

We also give thanks to Almighty God for so much that has been done to help, to rebuild, to assist in these months of unprecedented need. I think in the first place of those who welcomed and housed the great number of displaced families, elderly, and youth. How hard it is to flee one's home and livelihood! We thank those who have taken care of the homeless, the orphaned and the destitute. Priests, and men and women religious, gave as much as they could. To those of you who housed and fed people seeking safety, in churches, convents, rectories, and who continue to assist those still struggling, I thank you. You are a credit to the Church. You are the pride of your nation. I personally thank each one of you. For whatever you did for the least of Christ's brothers and sisters, you did for him (cf. Mt 25:41).

At this Mass we wish also to thank God for the good men and women who served as rescue and relief workers. We thank him for the many people around the world who generously gave of their time, money and goods. Countries, organizations and individuals across the globe put the needy first; it is an example that should be followed. I ask government leaders, international agencies, benefactors and people of goodwill not to give up. There is much that remains to be done. Though the headlines have changed, the needs continue.

Today's first reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews, urges us to hold fast in our confession, to persevere in our faith, to draw near with confidence to the throne of God's grace (cf. Heb 4:16). These words have a special resonance in this place. Amid great suffering you never ceased to confess the victory of the cross, the triumph of God's love. You have seen the power of that love revealed in the generosity of so many people and in so many small miracles of goodness. But you have also seen, in the profiteering, the looting and the failed responses to this great human drama, so many tragic signs of the evil from which Christ came to save us. Let us pray that this, too, will lead us to greater trust in the power of God's grace to overcome sin and selfishness. Let us pray in particular that it will make everyone more sensitive to the cry of our brothers and sisters in need. Let us pray that it will lead to a rejection of all forms of injustice and corruption which, by stealing from the poor, poison the very roots of society.

Dear brothers and sisters, throughout this ordeal you have felt the grace of God in a special way through the presence and loving care of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. She is our Mother. May she help you to persevere in faith and hope, and to reach out to all in need. And with Saints Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod and all the saints, may she continue to implore God's mercy and loving compassion for this country, and for all the beloved Filipino people. Amen. (source: rappler.com)