

**SENDING OFF OF FAMILIES IN ASIA TO BE LIGHTS
OF HOPE
UST Pavilion – May 16, 2014**

Magandang gabi po sa inyong lahat! Kumusta po kayo?
Mabuhay ang pamilyang Filipino! Long live Asian families!

Dear friends,

We are about to conclude an extraordinary week for the Philippines and for the churches in Asia. Indeed, our presence this evening manifests our oneness, our sharing of a common treasure, that is, our families.

As we have seen, the family's true value is always put into question nowadays. It is less perceived as subject of the common good of the society, where in fact it is the fundamental cell of the society. In particular, the family is the place where we learn the fundamental value of solidarity, solidarity between parents and children, among siblings, between grand children and grand parents. At the center of the family, we come to know the beauty of humanity through the different generations.

At the end, what is a family?

It is the sign of fecundity of human love between man and woman who give to one another, their whole life and have the capacity, through the expression of their love to give existence to new human beings. The family is the place where we learn to love life and to be amazed before a miracle of a new life. This joy of life is a fruit of love. It is not a choice that is uniquely individualistic but the choice of two spouses united by a conjugal love who together make this extraordinary project to found a family. We are all present today because someone has desired to give us the gift of life.

To understand well what mystery of human love is, let us listen to Jesus himself; In the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus once had a discussion with the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew that Jesus was considered by people as a great master. The Jews were used to listen to him not only in the synagogue but also outside. So the Pharisees asked Jesus a tricky question on freedom or better on what they consider as freedom. It was a question founded on the law of Moses on repudiating one's wife through the bill of repudiation. Does our law allow a man to divorce his wife for whatever reason he wishes? That was their question. Jesus instead brought their attention to what was in the beginning: Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them man and woman and said to them: this is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes united

with his wife and the two of them become one flesh. They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.

In the beginning, according to his divine design, God created the world and formed human being as male and female. The Pope Saint John Paul II, insisted much on the fact that through and with the creation of Eve, humanity has been constituted in his sexual differences. Both, he said, had the same dignity because they were created through a personal action of God, the Creator. But the Pharisees don't understand anything or at least they don't pay attention to the deep answer of Jesus. They are indifferent to the truth. What interests them is to continue the game of the tricky questions. They asked Jesus: "why, then, did Moses give the law for man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?" The trick is that they want Jesus either to contradict Moses and his tradition or to contradict himself with what he had just explained. Jesus answered: "Moses gave you permission to divorce your wife because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation." As you see, Jesus is doing three things: first, he did not fall into the trap: he did not contradict the existence of the Mosaic law; he did not criticize this law. So nobody could reproach him for having contradicted the Jewish law. Second, he maintains his teaching: "it was not like that at the time of creation." Third thing, he

shows the Pharisees why they do not understand God's design: they are so hard to teach. In truth, the right word used by Jesus is more expressive: "hardness of heart." It is more expressive because it suggests that if the Pharisees don't understand the truth of creation, it is not because of a lack of intellectual intelligence, but of a lack of intelligence of the heart.

Dear friends, dear families, dear young people, the time has come to ask the Lord to give us an open heart to understand Jesus' teachings and to decipher what the book of creation tells us. Let us keep always our hearts open so that we become more and more able to decipher between what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil.

An authentic love between man and woman is as natural as the desire to found a family with the one whom we love, and it is profoundly rooted in the heart of man. When an adolescent discovers being in-love for the first time, he could not imagine that this love would end. His profound desire is that his love never ends. This shows how much, the indissoluble union corresponds to the more profound aspiration of the human heart.

An open heart allows us not only to recognize our deep-rooted natural aspirations and desires. An open heart can also receive the light of the Holy Spirit to penetrate the mystery of human

love by contemplating how Jesus offered his life to the church, uniting the church to him, as a spouse unites his wife to himself.

Let us listen once more to these wonderful words of the apostle Paul: “husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the Church to himself in splendor, without a spot, yes, so that she maybe holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the Church, because we are members of his body.” For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. “This is a great mystery and I am applying it to Christ and the Church. In short, each of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband” (Eph 5:22-33).

As we see, St. Paul after his conversion had an open heart. That is why he was able to develop Jesus’ teaching and to explain human love from the perspective of God’s design. This is a great mystery, the mystery accomplishes, realizes and consumes itself in the love of Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

With an open heart, let us be open to the sacramental beauty of human love.

When the spouses and parents recognize that they receive from God such gift of love, they accept with all their hearts the presence of the Lord in their home. A Christian family is a family where God dwells. The Christian tradition has always decreed the family as “domestic church.” This means a place where God should be loved and adored. This establishes a true communion between persons. It is founded on a rock, on Christ himself.

In the Second Vatican Council, it is said that when spouses receive the sacrament of marriage, Christ comes to meet them and lives with them. The sacrament lasts through life because Christ does not make covenant with the spouses and abandon them later. Christ remains with them in joys and in pains, through out their lives.

I believe, my dear families, that the true reason of our joy and hope is justly because the Lord is in our midst, because he lives in every family we represent. We know that the family is gravely challenged. It is no longer respected and honored by diverse legislations around the world, but there is a joy which no legislator could take from us: the joy to know that God is

Emmanuel, he is with us, who lives in our homes, that he is present in the hearts of our children. For this reason, we are filled with hope and we receive from God the strength of our witnessing.

JP II often said that the family is not just an object of evangelization of family ministry, but it is first of all, the subject of evangelization. It is the family that evangelizes by its faith, by its love, through the joys of its members, its openness, hospitality, by the sense of solidarity with other families. It evangelizes also through the transmission of faith to its children, by the virtue of their upbringing and the communion, which renders it solid.

Be not afraid to bring to all the witness of your joyful faith and the joy of your love. Without this sense, a family is inhabitable.

The entire world needs you as a family. Think of the Asian continent, the Philippine has an immense richness to remain attached and faithful to the idea of a family in the evangelical sense of the term.

When we talk of Christian society, we refer always to the Philippines as example. When you have such riches, treasures, you do not want to lose it. During his first trip to Manila, St. JP

II said two things: first, that the Philippines shall be the essential factor of the evangelization in Asia. Second, that you shall Filipinize the world.

Evidently, most of us could think that the Polish Pope referred to the different Filipino communities all over the world. It is true. But the Pope wished to tell you other things as well, that through the model of the family you have, you will proclaim to the world, a message of love and hope.

Surely, yes, in this sense, dear families gathered this evening, Filipinize the world. Give always testimony of God's love in your lives. Listen once more what Pope John Paul II said to all families in the conclusion of his wonderful exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*: "Family become what you are."

As our dear Pope Francis is convoking two synods on the family, let us support him and offer all his intentions to our Lord for the fruitfulness of these important events extraordinarily important in our times. Let us become more and more, by responding to Jesus' call to sanctification, authentic lights of hope. Let us be faithful: yes, Filipino families and families of Asia become what you are: lights of hope for Asia and for the world. May the Lord bless you always.

Naway pagpalain kayo ng mapagmahal nating Panginoon at ibigay nya sa inyo ang kapayapaan, biyaya at kaligayahan. (May the loving Lord grant you his peace, his grace and his joy)!
Mabuhay!