

# APOSTOLIC LOVE

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*The visit in Asia-Oceania. - Love for people. - Defense of human rights.*

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## **The Visit in Asia Oceania**

I returned to Rome from Asia on January 10 after a long trip of nearly two months, which helped me to know another area of the Congregation: Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia. I will not write to you about every one of these countries, but I would like to share with you a few facts and attitudes that struck me more forcibly during this visit and helped me understand better our missionary vocation.

## **Love for people**

Love for people, especially for the poorest, is at the heart of this vocation: a love that is simple, based on the Gospel, creative. It consists of being present, of respect, kindness and dedication. If we want the Gospel to be accepted, we must begin by loving as Christ loved, and know how to make ourselves loved.

Everywhere I went, it seemed to me that the Oblates are close to the people, sincerely love them and are loved by them in return. In one of the countries I visited I heard a foreigner who is a government employee confess: "I am personally incapable of loving these people!". Had he been an Oblate, I would have been deeply shocked.

The Oblates' love finds many expressions that vary according to circumstances: teaching English and setting up kindergartens (in Japan), university responsibilities and housing projects (in the Philippines), marriage encounter apostolate and specialized retreats (in Australia), sharing the life of squatters (in Bagong Barrio, the Philippines), promoting the raising of goats and ducks (in Indonesia)... not to mention Oblate presence in the communications media, among prisoners, in parishes and colleges as well as in ordinary ministry. There is a great variety here, and no one gives up, even when conversions are few, as in Japan, or when dangers threaten, as in the southern Philippines. After the earthquakes and the civil war, there was no discouragement – one simply went back to work and started building all over again.

In some of these missions you can sense a remarkable vitality which strikes you like a breath of fresh air. Sometimes I felt like saying: In some of the older Provinces those who lack hope would benefit from seeing these things and realize there are still young men here who are interested in us and in our work.

Apostolic love in its many expressions is supple and very free. It answers a specific need, a concrete call that makes itself heard today. It finds its source in Jesus Christ – it is Christ's outlook on the world and his love for the world. And it leads to Jesus Christ – to make him known and loved by the witness of work and life, and it proceeds to the explicit proclaiming of salvation in Jesus Christ, through man's liberation, as Christ himself proclaimed and achieved it.

I have also noticed that what can hinder this love the most is division among us. That is how, if we are not careful, a mission can be paralyzed and all mission enthusiasm shattered. The final words of our

Founder: "Among yourselves charity, charity, charity, and in the world, zeal for the salvation of souls", still apply today. One doesn't go without the other. The charity among us that would not be open to the world of the poor would not be Oblate charity, and zeal that is not based on real acceptance and mutual love between Oblates would remain empty. Its witnessing would be powerless.

### **Defense of human rights**

On the eve of my departure, this is what I witnessed in Jakarta. Some forty refugees from Vietnam had just arrived in port, after 15 to 17 days of sailing aboard small craft in the most miserable conditions of extreme deprivation. Indonesia would not allow them to land and refused to receive them. A Maryknoll Father and others tried to bring them supplies and to find them havens in several countries. It seems that Australia and the United States were willing to accept them. The fate of these people is presently shared by several thousands on the China Sea, and that is only one illustration of what is happening to hundreds of thousands of human beings in various parts of the world.

In several countries where Oblates work, serious problems of social justice are coming to the fore. The General Council in plenary session has started to study this question. What priority should promoting social justice have in our vocation? It is clear that no Oblate today can remain indifferent to this problem. Concern for a more just world must constantly be present in our ministry as in our lives.

In promoting justice some Oblates give more of themselves through direct commitments. At times these Oblates may have the impression that they are seen as "marginal" or "special cases"... They are nothing of the sort; all to the contrary, but – as they themselves well know – to work directly in promoting justice is a difficult and sensitive task. It publicly affects persons and institutions, often annoys many people, and calls for both prudence and courage. This I notice: much more is usually demanded of the apostle for justice than of any other; people want him to be perfectly balanced and exemplary in all things! Because his action is undoubtedly more progressive and disturbs them more, people show themselves to be more severe toward him, even too severe. That may well be a safeguard but it is also a cross, the cross of the "prophet" which always implies a measure of solitude. Whoever is called thereto by the Lord must accept to carry it, but others must also avoid as much as possible making it heavier for no good reason.

Later on, as our reflection develops, I will have occasion to return to this subject. Let us remember meanwhile that it is impossible to have evangelization of the poor as our aim unless we are concerned with the problem of justice.

We shall soon start on the road to Easter. Our Constitutions remind us that we are "the co-operators of Christ the Saviour in his paschal mystery" (1966, art. 7) and they ask us to "bear in our own body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be operative in all men" (1966, art. 14).

In wishing you a Happy Easter, I add: May you wholly live this mystery and be its faithful witnesses everywhere!