

ADDRESS ATENEO DE DAVAO UNIVERSITY
 DAVAO CITY, PHILIPPINES
 March 21, 1992

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin

Mabuhay! I cannot begin to tell you how happy I am to be here in Davao with all of you today. Your beautiful city and the ocean so near are a pleasure for anyone who has come from Chicago which is just beginning to recover from the winter cold. *Ka'-mi po' ay nag-pa'-pa'-sa-la'mat sa in-yo'ng ma-pa'g-ma-hal na pa'g-tang-gap sa a'min!* (We are very grateful for your warm welcome.)

For many years I have wanted to visit the Philippines, and, so, I was very happy when Cardinal Sin invited me to preach the homily for the Mass commemorating the 25th anniversary of his episcopal ordination. This gave me the opportunity to visit a number of places other than Manila. When the President of your university invited me to come here to receive this honorary degree, I eagerly accepted his invitation. I am delighted to share this commencement celebration with all of you. Thank you for inviting me, and thank you again for the honor of this doctorate which you have graciously bestowed on me.

In a very special way, I wish to bring the greetings of the bishops, priests, religious, and laity of the Archdiocese of Chicago to Archbishop Antonio Mabutias, Archbishop of Davao.

The Philippine Islands are truly a tropical paradise where a visitor, like me, could easily get spoiled by the natural beauty and your internationally known hospitality. Americans call the Philippines the Pearl of the Orient, and all the natural beauty which I see here convinces me that the title is no exaggeration!

But how do you ever count all these islands? As I flew here from Manila and Cebu, they seem to be everywhere! Each island appears to be different from every other, but all of them reflect the beauty that is ultimately found in God.

Although I only arrived in Davao last evening, I might as well confess to you that I have a problem. I have not yet gotten up the courage to eat the Durian fruit. Everyone tells me that it is very delicious, but my nostrils tell me to keep away. Perhaps some time when I am distracted by the grandeur of Mt. Apo, someone will quietly give me a slice of Durian, and I will find another reason to want to return again to your lovely city!

Although I could continue to rhapsodize about the natural beauty of the Philippines and the warmth that everyone has shown me since I arrived, I wish to speak to you this morning about a serious topic: *justice and peace*. When I hear what is being done to destroy this paradise, I am -- like yourselves, I am sure -- very troubled, and I assure you that many of your friends around the world are also very concerned. In particular, I am painfully aware of the unrest and violence which have plagued Mindanao and Davao during the past decade. I speak to you from my experience as a pastor, not as a politician or statesman. As you may know, I chaired the U.S. Catholic bishops' committee which drafted a pastoral letter on war and peace, entitled *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. The U.S. episcopal conference approved the final text in May, 1983. While we devoted considerable time and energy to studying the intricacies of the nuclear debate, we also came away from our extensive research, consultation, and discussion with some firmly held convictions about the vital importance of justice and peace in contemporary life. Indeed, a major portion of the pastoral letter dealt with the ways in which we might shape a peaceful world. Now that the nuclear threat has subsided, it is that section of the pastoral letter that is more relevant to our times.

I am convinced that we are living in a "new moment" in the world today. That is no less true of the Philippines. At the same time, I firmly believe that a new, just international order can only be built on mutual respect among *individuals, communities, and nations*. Every *human life* -- from conception to natural death, and in all its circumstances -- is a sacred gift from God and has its own innate dignity and worth. There are no exceptions! Because every human being is made in God's "image and likeness", we must defend and protect, nurture and enhance each life. We are all brothers and sisters,

children of the one God, and we *are* our brother's and sister's keeper! Every *community* has its own traditions, heritage, and aspirations, but, in the contemporary world, communities need to find effective ways to live in harmony and share the limited resources of this earth with one another. When they fail to do this, competition for scarce resources breeds unrest, violence, and, ultimately, tragic destruction of precious human lives. Wherever human life is considered "cheap" and easily "wasted," eventually no life is safe, and the future of civilization itself is in doubt.

Moreover, in an increasingly interdependent world, every *nation* needs to learn how to live in justice and harmony with all others. No nation can isolate itself from others, nor can or should one nation any longer dominate the others. Brutal force cannot prevail in the long run. We have seen that in the past two or three years with the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the collapse of the former Soviet Union. It remains to be seen how long brutal oppression can keep citizens in check in other parts of the world. But the handwriting is already on the wall: Ultimately, the *people* will prevail!

How do I know this? Not only from the events in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the former Soviet Union. I know this, my friends, because of what you accomplished here in the Philippines. You have a special phrase for it: *bayan ko*. This was your motto sung during the February 1986, EDSA Revolution in Manila. The whole world cheered as they saw Filipinos kneel on the streets praying for peace. Your demonstration of "people power" was very powerful, indeed. The government was toppled, and you did not fire a shot, nor was there any disturbance of the peace. *Bayan ko* rang out from your throats, and there lumps in the throats of the rest of the world as people watched you on television. What heroes and heroines you were at that time! The whole world praised the Filipino people, and you came to full stature as a nation -- made up of many communities, but one people. You have a proverb which says this very succinctly: There are many people, but there is only one native country.

Today, I urge you, my fellow graduates at the Ateneo de Davao, to adopt once again that same spirit of *bayan ko*. Dedicate yourselves to making the Philippines the nation that brought all of the

rest of us to our feet cheering for you. You are no longer a colony of any foreign power! You are your own free nation! You have the resources, the intellectual leaders, and the ideals which could again make the Philippines the freest and the most productive nation in Southeast Asia. Moreover, by reason of both geography and culture, you can serve as the bridge between East and West, something that is very much needed as the world's attention shifts to the Pacific Rim of nations.

Let the world look up to you as a model of democracy, decency, and justice for all your citizens. For the benefit of your beloved Philippines use the skills you have learned here in teaching, ministry, commerce, banking, industry, medicine, and all the other major subjects which you have studied during your years at the Ateneo de Davao. Let the poor people on the farms and in the cities realize that you are dedicated to their welfare so that hunger, poverty, and disease will disappear from the Philippines because of your efforts. Dedicate yourselves to building a just society, and you will enjoy the fruit of justice: civic harmony and peace.

I do not pretend that this will be easy. Living in accord with gospel values is never without obstacles and roadblocks. Injustice and inequality have deep roots. Longstanding enmities among families, tribes, and regions are not easily forgotten or set aside. Evil is deeply entrenched in the world, and worldly values easily distract us from carrying out our countercultural mission of justice and peace. And, yes, at times, good people lose their lives in this struggle.

I do not say this lightly. On April 7, 1988, Father Carl Schmitz, a Passionist priest from Chicago, who ministered among the Bilaans here on Mindanao, was brutally murdered. For fifteen years he had served his people with great love, compassion, and generosity. Commenting on his death, a Chicago newspaper said that his obituary should have included the words "Survived by 80,000 Bilaans." Yes, Father Schmitz has been dead for nearly four years, but his voice has not been stilled. The gospel he proclaimed -- a message of justice and peace -- is still heard in the land.

And you my brothers and sisters, must continue to proclaim that message, especially by the way you live and serve your country.

You have your own saint to guide you -- Lorenzo Ruiz, a family man from Manila, someone very much like you.

As you build your nation and shape it with the values of justice and peace, I hope that you and I will continue to be friends. Historically, the Philippines and the United States have many good memories together, and some, perhaps, that are not so good. But, together, we have come through many struggles, and I assure you that the American people want to continue to be your friends. The nature of our relationship is shifting, and that is healthy. But let us strive to respond to the "new moment" we both face in such a way that we will dig deep roots of mutual respect and harmony which will preserve and strengthen our relationship.

My dear brothers and sisters, my prayer for you and for the Philippines is that God will help you form a nation firmly built on justice, integrity, democracy, and respect for all human life. As I have acknowledged, this will not be easy. But neither was your February "people's power" revolution. With *bayan ko* in your hearts and on your lips, and St. Lorenzo guiding you, you will not fail. You have the God-given capacity to produce another revolution, and, if you do, the world will again both cheer for you and learn from you!