Message to the Holy Father

14 March 2021, St. Peter´s Basilica

+Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle

Holy Father,

We, the Filipino migrants in Rome want to express our gratitude to you for leading us in this Eucharistic celebration in thanksgiving for the arrival of the Christian faith in the Philippines five hundred years ago. We bring you the filial love of Filipinos in the 7641 islands of our country. There are more than ten million Filipino migrants living in almost one hundred countries in the world. They are united with us this morning. We treasure your concern for us and for all migrants in Rome, consistently manifested by Your Vicar for the Diocese of Rome, His Eminence Cardinal Angelo de Donatis, by the Director of the Diocesan Office Migrantes, Monsignor Pierpaolo Felicolo, and by the Scalabrinian Fathers, Fr. Leonir Mario Chiarello, Superior General, Fr. Fabbio Baggio, under-secretary of the Section on Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development and the Chaplain of the Centro Filippino, Fr. Ricky Gente. We also thank Rev. Gregory Gaston, the national coordinator of Filipino chaplains in Italy.

The coming of the Christian faith to our land is God’s gift. That the Christian faith was received by majority of our people and given by them a Filipino character is God’s gift. Now the Philippines has the third largest number of Catholics in the world. This is truly God’s gift. We attribute the enduring faith of the Filipino people only to God’s love, mercy, and fidelity, not to any merit of our own.

From 1521 to 2021, we see gift upon gift. We thank God for the bearers of the gift these 500 years: the pioneering missionaries, the religious congregations, the clergy, the grandmothers and grandfathers, the mothers and fathers, the teachers, the catechists, the parishes, the schools, the hospitals, the orphanages, the farmers, the laborers, the artists, and the poor whose wealth is Jesus. By God’s grace, the Filipino Christians have continued to receive the faith, one of the sources of hope in facing poverty, economic inequality, political upheavals, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and even the current pandemic. As we confess our failure in living the faith in a consistent manner, we also recognize the great contribution of the Christian faith in shaping the Filipino culture and the Filipino nation.

The gift must continue being a gift. It must be shared. If it is kept for oneself, it ceases to be a gift. By God’s mysterious design, the gift of faith we have received is now being shared by the millions of Christian Filipino migrants in different parts of the world. We have left our families, not to abandon them, but to care for them and their future. For love of them, we endure the sorrow of separation. When lonely moments come, Filipino migrants find strength in Jesus who journeys with us, the Jesus who became a Child (Santo Niño) and known as the Nazarene (Jesus Nazareno), bore the Cross for us. We are assured of the embrace of our Mother Mary and the protection of the saints. When we miss our families, we turn to the parish, our second home. When there is no one to talk with, we pour our hearts to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and ponder His word. We take care of the children under our charge as our own children, and the elderly as our own parents. We sing, we smile, we laugh, we cry, and we eat. We pray that through our Filipino migrants, the name of Jesus, the beauty of the Church, and the justice, mercy and joy of God may reach the ends of the earth. Here in Rome, when we miss our grandfathers, we know we have a Lolo Kiko. Thank you very much, Salamat, Holy Father. Mabuhay!