

Speech
of
His Excellency Benigno S. Aquino III

At the Inauguration of the Photo Exhibit Foto a Foto: Un Retrato de España

[Delivered at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila on October 24, 2011]

Buenas tardes. Please sit down.

His Excellency Jorge Domecq puts in a very embarrassing position. He has tried to speak in Tagalog. I have had quite a number of years learning the Spanish language and unfortunately my professors, who did their utmost, were not able to inculcate in me the beauty of the language of Spain. [Laughter] So, can I just... May it suffice that I wish you all Buenos tardes. [Laughter and applause]

In kindergarten, I was—what was then called—enrolled in Institucion Teresiana or should I say [in Spanish diction] Institucion Teresiana. And, my mother asked me how school was and I said: When they were talking in English, I could understand everything; or even when they talked in Tagalog, I understood everything. But, they have a different form of English there, which was too deep. Later on, I found out that was not English. That was Spanish. [Laughter] In kindergarten, we were all expected to be trilingual. In college, it turns out that most of my professors in Spanish were students of my grandmother who assumed that I had the faculty and the fluency in that language that my grandmother exhibited and up to this day, I think, many of them do not understand why I was not as good as my grandmother.

To many Filipinos today, the image of Spain is like a sepia-toned snapshot of the 19th century from the time when we were still a colony. But it is in events like this where we are given opportunities to radically expand our mental landscape—and to connect the landscape of historical memory to the present. These photos give us an insight into how Spain is today, and how it has changed through the decades—and it is different from what we usually learn in our History classes.

It may be a bit startling for us to see such images, as they do not really conform to our traditional view. But this is the reality of the people with whom we share a long and historical relationship. The best part of exhibits like this is how much we can discover of a people with whom we share common aspects of faith and culture—what makes us different, yes; but also those parts of ourselves that we can see in them.

If I may add, this also serves as a fitting tribute to Rizal's 150th birth anniversary this year. Once, our national hero separated himself from his family for years to

travel to Spain—to learn about and understand Spanish culture; and today, we see ourselves presented with the opportunity to follow in his footsteps in our own ways—to better familiarize ourselves with how Spain is now, more than a century after his time.

Both our countries have changed so much in the past years, and the Philippines and Spain alike have been fortunate enough to rebuild their ties and to build an enduring friendship with each other. Today, we see that this is the Spain we have fostered such a productive relationship with.

Today, as we view these photos together—photos that show the rapid changes of Spanish society over the past half-century—we take another step in ensuring that the friendship between our countries will only gain strength in the coming years.

To our countrymen: if you can take some time out of your busy schedules to view this exhibit, then you may want to visit this museum. Few things can be as refreshing as seeing things from a different perspective, and in some cases, allowing those perspectives to change our own.

If the eye is the window to the soul, then our friends from Spain today have truly opened their windows to us. May we see them through those windows with the same spirit of understanding, the same embracing of change, and the same love of life that in the past had made firm friends between our own founding fathers and those Spaniards who even then dared to dream of liberty for our country.

Thank you and may I wish everyone a very good day.