

## Rob, kill bishops? Some clergy living luxurious lives while masses endure poverty—Palace

By: **Nestor Corrales** - Reporter / @NCorralesINQ

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Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo. INQUIRER file photo

MANILA, Philippines—The latest threat of President Rodrigo to rob and kill rich bishops was only meant to emphasize the failure of some Church leaders to empathize with the poor while they—the clergy—continue to live luxurious lives, Malacañang said Friday.

In a speech in Masbate on Wednesday, Duterte suggested to bystanders to rob and kill moneyed bishops, stepping up his attacks on the church that has been critical of his brutal drug war.

“Listening to his speech with an open mind and watching his body language, one can easily discern that [Duterte] was only airing his sentiments against some Church leaders who are living in luxury, contrary to their teachings,” Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

“His use of figures of speech is his style in articulating and dramatizing a point,” Panelo said.

“In the case instant, he wishes to stress the failure of some bishops to empathize with the masses as they live comfortably in their rectories while the latter endures the vestiges of poverty,” he said.

“If only these detractors do not turn a blind eye to the context of the President’s speeches and momentarily suspend their incorrigible biases, they will be one with the majority of the Filipinos in comprehending what the President means,” he added.

Despite his relentless attacks against the Catholic Church, Panelo said Duterte “respects the Christian faith.”

He cited the President signing Republic Act No. 11163, otherwise known as the National Bible Day Act, “which recognizes the value of the Holy Bible, as the core of Christian faith, and of its reading, as a communion between Christians and their Creator.”

He also said the President’s message during the Feast of the Black Nazarene, acknowledging “our people’s enduring devotion to the Black Nazarene,” attests to our Duterte’s “strong faith in God.”

The President’s actions, he said, has shown that “he recognizes the fundamental role of religion in the lives of the Filipino people, all with its rich cultural, social and ethnic diversity.”

“It is therefore his fervent hope that the free exercise of all religions pursuant to the Constitution shall aid and encourage the development of the moral character and spiritual foundation of our citizens,” he said.

Panelo said: “Given his view on the importance of religion and even including himself as a believer in the Divine and the Black Nazarene, it becomes the duty of the President to subject some of its leaders on their hypocritical practices, especially so when some of them commenced the adverse narratives against him using the pulpit and even wishing the President’s demise.”

“If the men of the cloth can unleash tirades against the President then they should be able to receive some lashes from him to return the favor,” he said. /jpv