

Baltimore Archdiocese Filipino celebration brings another big crowd to cathedral

On the last full day of summer, nearly 2,000 people from across the Mid-Atlantic region turned out for the ninth annual Archdiocese of Baltimore Filipino Saints Fiesta Celebration at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland Sept. 22.

Archbishop William E. Lori celebrated Mass, which honored the first two Filipino saints, San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod. The liturgy included vibrant movement from sinulog dancers, and solemn sounds from the Archdiocesan Filipino Choir, managed by Myrna Ortega.

Worshipers sang and prayed as they honored the two 17th-century saints. In his **homily**, Archbishop Lori spoke about the trials endured by San Lorenzo Ruiz, and the sacrifices made by San Pedro Calungsod.

“He (Ruiz) went to a land where he and his companions would die a slow and painful death because they refused to give up their Catholic faith,” the archbishop said. “He (Calungsod) and his fellow missionaries endured great hardships and dangers but they pressed on, preaching the faith, baptizing infants and adults, and in spite of everything, their work bore the good and lasting fruit of the Gospel.”

The archbishop told the congregants, “Both of them made shrewd and prudent choices and decisions, and they made them, not for their own comfort and profit but for sake of holiness, discipleship and the Gospel.”

After Mass, a procession made its way around the cathedral. It included statues of the two saints carried on high beds of roses, led by children dressed in bright outfits crafted in the Philippines.

A joyful cultural celebration of dance and food followed on the cathedral plaza. In addition to the archdiocese and Washington, D.C., it included mission partners from Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Father Pete Literal, pastor of St. John the Evangelist, Long Green Valley, in Hydes, is chaplain of the archdiocesan Filipino Council and founder of the celebration. He is encouraged by the event's growing traditions and regional appeal.

"The goal of the council is to make this a regional event, so we invite other groups from other areas," Father Literal said. "The whole intent is to bring all of the Filipino-American organizations, civic and religious, together to pray, and also to enjoy and celebrate the first two Filipino saints."

Raymond Gaviola, one of the sinulog dancers, is a parishioner of St. Francis de Sales in Abingdon. It was his sixth year dancing at the celebration.

"It's important that we keep the culture alive," said Gaviola, who performs up to 15 times a year throughout the Baltimore-Washington corridor. "That's why so many organizations come together and help support this event."

Gaviola played the "Prince" in the opening number, "Singkil," an original creation choreographed by Laurie Smith and based on a 14th-century story from the southern Philippines about a princess caught in a storm and saved by the prince.

"I want to embrace my culture more," Gaviola said. "I am American born, so I want to learn more about it. I want to help spread it to the community. That's what we're all doing today."