

Feast of San Lorenzo Ruiz

Introduction

What a joy to be with you this afternoon at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen to celebrate the feast day of two Filipino saints: San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calunsgod (kuh LUN sud). Warmest thanks to Dr. Ruben Ballesteros and Father Pete Literal for kindly inviting me to lead and take part in this celebration and in thanking you I extend my gratitude to Archdiocesan Filipino Council for your all that you do to foster the New Evangelization among the growing number of Filipino families here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. At the same time, I would like to welcome Couples for Christ and to thank you for all that you do to promote the vocation of marriage and family. And let us remember all those who lost their lives in Typhoon Haiyan as well as those who responded so heroically to that tragedy. We salute their faith, their courage, and their heroic love!

Universal Call to Holiness

The II Vatican Council clearly taught that every one of us is called to holiness. Indeed, something way deep down in us keeps telling us that we are made for more than this world can offer - whether it's pleasure, riches, or power. We are made in God's image and so we are really happy only when we reflect God's love and share his friendship. And holiness is nothing other than sharing in God's own life and love.

In the Church we find all the means to holiness that we need, for in the Church we meet Christ and experience his love. Christ speaks to us in Scripture and in the Church's teaching; Christ is present in the Sacraments with his saving power; we are taught how to pray to deepen our friendship with Jesus and our faith and worship prompt us to live like the followers & friends of Jesus. What's more we help one another, in the community of the Church we help one another to face the challenges and difficulties of life and along the way we help another to grow in our friendship with Christ. As we do all this, we bear witness to Jesus and make him known to others.

All this we know. It's a very basic part of our faith. But there is something else we need to grow in holiness: we need role models. I can tell you that my vocation as a priest was inspired by a number of very excellent priests who deeply influenced me.

Their dedication and joy helped me to accept my priestly vocation from Christ. And to tell the truth, we all need role models for our particular vocation. That is why each year we turn to San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod (kuh LUN sud). They are the glory of the Church in the Philippines and they are also wonderful examples of sanctity for the laity and for the young.

San Lorenzo Ruiz

You know well the stories of these two saints yet it's always good to re-tell those stories just as we repeat stories in our families over and over again. San Lorenzo, who hails from the 17th Century, was married and had three children, two sons & a daughter and he was employed as a calligrapher for a Dominican parish. By all accounts, he and his wife had a tranquil home and happy existence until Ruiz was unjustly implicated in a murder. The Dominican friars believed him to be innocent and helped him escape by sending him on a missionary journey. That journey brought him to Nagasaki, Japan, where he and his companions would die a slow and painful death because they refused to give up their Catholic faith. As Lorenzo Ruiz famously declared in 1637, "I will never do it. I am a Catholic and happy to die for God. If I have a thousand lives to offer, I will offer them for God!" He was both a layman and missionary who became a martyr. As St. Pope John Paul II said of him: "It is the heroism which he demonstrated as a lay witness to the faith ... which is very important in today's world."

Pope Francis teaches us that we are called to be missionary disciples. He reminds us that lay people are the ones who bring the Gospel to the world. Your families, your homes, your places of work are the "front lines" where you share your faith in Jesus and bear witness to His love. Please God you will not have to make a dramatic escape from your homes and journey to a place of persecution - but you do have to take Jesus and your faith with you wherever you go and sometimes, as you know, standing up for your faith, isn't easy. San Lorenzo Ruiz reminds you of your call to holiness and your responsibility as members of the laity to bear witness to the faith.

San Pedro Calunsgod

If San Lorenzo Ruiz, the first saint of the Philippines is a role model for the laity, San Pedro Calunsgod (kuh LUN sud) is a role model for young people. We don't know all the details of the earliest part of his life but we do know that at the age of 14 he was

a catechist and was already recognized as a young person growing in holiness. He was chosen by Spanish Jesuits to go on a missionary journey to what are now known as the Marianas Islands, eventually serving in Guam.

There he, San Vitores, and his fellow missionaries endured great hardships, but they pressed on, preaching Christianity, teaching the catechism, baptizing infants and adults, all the while aware that they were in great danger. But their labors bore great fruit...many became Christians. What everyone noticed was how kind San Pedro and his companions were. He spread the faith not by force but by the power of love. He touched their hearts and so opened their minds to the truth and love, which faith in Jesus brings.

Let us remember how young he was when he died for the faith, only in his 20's. He lost none of his youthful energy and derring-do yet his degree of friendship with God, his holiness was far beyond his years, so much so, that when the moment of martyrdom arrived, he laid down his life willingly for the Catholic faith. His martyrdom led to still more conversions to Christianity. He bore witness to a love stronger than any human power or hatred.

Sometimes I think we underestimate young people today. We think there are no longer young people who love the Lord and the faith, and are generous. It just isn't true, is it? Think about World Youth Day in Manila when 4 million young people turned out! Think about World Youth Day coming up in Krakow when Pope Francis will pray and dialogue with a huge number of young people from around the world. And everywhere I go in this Archdiocese I meet wonderful young people whom Christ is calling to be his friends and witnesses - and calling to special vocations, including the priesthood and religious life. San Pedro Calunsgod (kuh LUN sud) will help you say "yes" to whatever the Lord has in mind for you.

Conclusion

This is a beautiful day for the Filipino Saints Fiesta! And it's a beautiful day to celebrate the Filipino heritage and presence, a vibrant faith, a resilient spirit, a solidarity built on faith, that greatly enriches and strengthens the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Thank you for your fidelity, your love, your witness to Jesus! May the Lord bless you and keep you always in His love.