

Filipino community lives out Pope Francis' call to missionary discipleship

A standing-room-only gathering packed the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland Sept. 17 for the seventh annual Archdiocesan Filipino Saints Fiesta Celebration.

The theme for the Mass and cultural celebration was, "Captivated by the Holy Spirit, we stir into flame our love and service for the Lord." That gets at the heart of our call as Christians, said John Smith, chairman of the Filipino Council of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

In a commemorative booklet, Smith writes, "We have been called by Jesus himself in the gospels, and more recently by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, 'Joy of the Gospel,' and by Archbishop Lori in his pastoral direction 'A Light Brightly Visible' to be missionary disciples of the Lord."

In his homily Archbishop William E. Lori quoted St. Paul's letter to the Romans, saying, "None of us lives for one's self. None of us dies for one's self. For if we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord."

The two martyred Filipino saints at the heart of the day's honors, Pedro Calungsod and Lorenzo Ruiz, lived out those words.

Archbishop Lori recalled the words of St. Lorenzo, who was tortured and killed in Japan, "I will never renounce my faith because I am Christian, and I shall die for God. For him I will give many thousands of lives if I had them."

Of the two 17th-century saints, Archbishop Lori said, “They teach us ... forgiveness and self-giving love. Those are two qualities that you and I need if we would be ardent Christians on fire for the love of Jesus.”

The archbishop went on to tell congregants, “If we would be true missionary disciples then we have to learn day-by-day how to live not for ourselves, not for our own convenience and comfort, rather to live for others, to spend our lives serving others.”

Service to others is a way of life for many in the Filipino community, according to Dr. Bayani Elma, who handles communications for several Filipino-American organizations that were represented.

“We call that Bayanihan,” Elma said, which means “cooperative endeavor.”

“The Bayanihan spirit is to help everybody,” explained Borja Elma. “Help your neighbor, and that spirit transcends to missionary discipleship.”

Hermi Nudo is the founding president of Katipunan, a non-profit Filipino-American association focused on social and educational programs. He agrees that missionary discipleship is evident in the Filipino community.

“We have a tradition in the Philippines that after someone dies a novena begins,” Nudo said. “People come to visit as soon as they hear (of the death) even without a formal invitation.”

A spirit of missionary discipleship is also at the root of the Filipino Council of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

“We like to help each organization succeed,” Elma said, of the dozens of council mission partners that cross religious, cultural, civic and parish-based sectors.

Each was well represented during the celebration, which drew 51 organizations from Maryland, Virginia, D.C., Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. After Mass and an outdoor procession, many of the organizations provided Filipino food and participated in a talent show of sorts to display traditional songs and dances.

The Archdiocesan Filipino Council sponsors its second annual FLARE (Faith and Leadership Assembly for Renewal and Empowerment) conference, focusing on connecting good will, good works and the Good News Nov. 18 at St. Philip Neri in Linthicum Heights.