

Mabuhay !

is how Our Lady greets her Filipino children who visit her Sanctuary. “Mabuhay” is a welcome in Tagalog, the common language of the Filipino people, and has many meanings, including “to life” and “filled with joy in seeing you”.

We were once asked about the “*Filipino Mass*” and when it began. The question surprised us because we had not thought of the English Mass that way. We certainly understood what was meant though because, rain or shine, many Filipino people attend the 8:30 am Sunday Mass.

Filipino friends have told us that one of the reasons many come to Our Lady’s Sanctuary is that they feel welcome. Over the years getting to know these good people, we have come to learn much about them.



Filipinos are a people who highly value their faith, their family and their culture. They greatly revere the Church, which has long been central in their lives, and show great deference to priests and religious.

The Philippines is the only Christian nation in all of Asia. Today nearly 84% of its more than 100 million people are Catholic and many have a great devotion to our Blessed Mother. Of the 27 shrines in the country, 18 honour the Mother of God. They have a familial intimacy with our Blessed Mother and she is often called “*Mamma Mary*”. Our

Lady's Sanctuary in Rigaud knows well of this devotion to Our Lady since many Filipino people attend not only the early Mass, but all the Sunday Masses, and some honour our Blessed Mother with a promise to visit her Sanctuary every Sunday during the season.

The use of sacramentals has remained strong among the Filipino people. They often ask for blessings and prayers and they like to wipe, touch, kiss, embrace and venerate sacred objects and places. In a sense it is like reaching up to heaven and touching the Divine while here on earth. The Bishops of the Philippines have said *"In truth, our Filipino faith is deep and simple. We are not embarrassed to perform religious rites. Many even dare to follow religious practices in places where the faith is banned"*.

As they emigrate from the Philippines, they bring their faith around the world. In Canada, many dioceses recognize that they have made an important contribution by bringing back long-neglected devotions and revitalizing nearly empty parishes. It is not hard to imagine Our Lord using the Filipino people to help re-evangelize the Western world.

Another notable characteristic of the faith of the Filipinos is their gratitude. Although they are a

people with a long history of natural disasters and much poverty, they are still grateful for their blessings and continually offer thanksgiving to the Lord. They have an attitude of providential trust expressed as *"Bahala na"*, which means *"I will do my best. Let God take care of the rest"*.

Filipino people are family-centered and place great importance on protecting and nurturing the family. At an early age the young are taught the value of family and to respect their elders. All members of a family feel an obligation to care for one another, especially for the young and the old.

Our Filipino brothers and sisters are also meal-oriented and have a great sense of hospitality. *"Tuloy po kayo at kumain muna tayo"* is an often used invitation which



means “*come and eat with us*”. Every Sunday many families have picnics after Mass and often invite others to join them. Potlucks are an expression of this wonderful way to share in larger community groups and after the 8:30 am Mass there are many times when everyone comes together for a potluck.

In the Philippines neighbours usually know each other well and there is a practice called *«bayanihan»*, which means “*helping out one another when the need arises*”. Filipinos around the world still have this generosity of spirit and help neighbours back home by sending clothes, food, money, whatever they can, not only in times of disaster, but year-round.

Back to the question of when the Filipino people started coming to the early Mass. We believe it all began with the Rosary.

With Fr. Gaston, our celebrant at the time, we thought it would be a good idea and fitting to pray the Rosary before Mass, particularly because it was Our Lady’s Sanctuary. But before prayer could begin, the chapel had to be cleaned and prepared for Mass. In no time at all a lovely Filipino lady showed up and offered to help. Before we knew it, she found a broom



Foto de Peter B. Brown, c. 1980

and began pitching in. It was not long after that more people began appearing early for the Rosary and Mass, just a few in the beginning and then, more and more. They came from different parishes and areas and were strangers (but, in typical Filipino fashion, everyone soon got to know each other). We don’t know how they came to know about the Rosary, the early Mass or even the Sanctuary! Could it have been Mamma Mary?

Today we pray the Rosary in English and Tagalog, with different

people, young and old, leading a decade. Fr. Larose, our current celebrant, touched the hearts of many Filipinos when he learned the Rosary in their language and now he leads a decade in Tagalog.

Many volunteers come early to help at the 8:30 am Mass. They clean the chapel and the grotto, restock the candles, raise the flags, arrange flowers, give out Mass and prayer cards and help with the collection – any job that needs doing. They have donated altar bells and an altar cloth and paid for the Holy Hour books. They constantly bring flowers and make prayer cards for the people – all out of the goodness of their hearts and their love for Mamma Mary.

Thanks to our Rector, Fr. René Pageau, and those attending the early Mass, a monthly Holy Hour of Adoration was revived at Our Lady's Sanctuary. In pious Filipino fashion, it begins with a procession and each month a different family or group takes responsibility for the Hour. They lead the procession with candles, incense and flowers and help with the prayers.

What has emerged at the Sanctuary is a sense of a faith community celebrating together the joy found in Christ Jesus. The faith of the Filipino people, their love of Our Lord and devotion to his Blessed Mother, inspires and challenges us to grow in our faith.

From the top of Rigaud



Photo de René Brunton, C.S.V.

Mountain, the Clerics of St-Viateur, with Mamma Mary, call out to everyone, Filipino or not, a genuine and heartfelt: **Mabuhay!**

*Aba Ginoong Maria, napupuno ka ng grasya
Ang Panginoong Diyos ay sumasaiyo.
Bukod kang p inagpala sa babaeng lahat
At pinagpala naman ng iyong anak na si Hesus.
Santa Maria, Ina ng Diyos
Ipanalangin mo kaming makasalan
Ngayon at kung kami ay mamamatay. Amen.*

Peter and Linda Krushelnyski