



A Celebration of *Flores de Mayo* and the First *Santacruzán* at the Montfort Generalate Grotto

ROME - In honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Filipino community at the Montfort Missionaries General House grotto led by Fr. Reynaldo B. Bullas Jr., SMM celebrated *Flores de Mayo* here in Rome for the whole month of May 2019 which culminated in a *Santacruzán procession*.

Flores de Mayo is a religious festival held in the Philippines in the month of May. It is one of the devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and lasts for the entire month. The feast is usually marked with the daily offering of flowers to the Blessed Mother at the church. However, the Filipino community here in Rome celebrated the event in a special and unique manner. Instead of going to the church, Marian devotees under the remarkable leadership of Fr. Rey, had a nightly house-to-house family visit, bringing the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary from May 1-31, 2019.

Every visit started with the beautiful rendition of Immaculate Mother as the opening song. Then, a Prayer of Acceptance to the Blessed Mother was recited by a respective family member and was immediately followed by the praying of the Holy Rosary. After which, the family or anyone from the group was encouraged to say a prayer of their personal intentions. Most of them thanked God for all the blessings they have received while others prayed for good health, stable job, harmonious relationship with other people, peace and unity, longer life and most importantly, for the safety and bright future of their children. Moreover, Fr. Rey also gave his special blessing to the families and to each one present by sharing his fervent prayers that made them emotional whilst some even cried. Each family was delighted with the visitation of the Blessed Virgin and through these prayers, they found their affections to God kindled and their hearts warmed towards one another. They were all in high spirits. Possessing the values of hospitality and generosity, each family also shared their blessings by preparing a sumptuous

dinner for the visiting Marian devotees. On the next evening, a Farewell Prayer was read before the statue of Virgin Mary is brought to the next family as the celebration continued to the next house.

As a highlight of the celebration of *Flores de Mayo*, a religious festivity called *Santacruzán* was held on the 2nd day of June in honour of Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great – the first Christian emperor, who found the relics of the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and also ended the persecution of Christians. As led by Fr. Rey, each family visited by Our Lady had a *Sagala* for the procession who portrayed a biblical figure of significant women and Marian titles, dressed in beautiful gowns. Just to mention a few are *Reyna Esther*, *Reyna Paz*, *Reyna del Cielo*, *Reyna de las Flores* and the most popular of them all, *Reyna Elena*. The chosen women felt so happy and blessed for being the *Sagalas* as they marched through the procession. Walking towards the altar, each *Sagala* offered flowers to Mary, the blessed Mother of God who was crowned by *Reyna Elena* after the flower offering. The most powerful prayers in the world to Our Lord is through the intercession of the Blessed Mother and the whole *Santacruzán* procession symbolizes the rosary as the intercessory prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The festival was concluded by the celebration of the Holy Eucharist that was presided over by Fr. Reynaldo B. Bullas Jr., SMM with Assistant General Fr. Felix Mabvuto Phiri, SMM as concelebrant who was present during the entire celebration. After the mass, the community remained and had lunch together manifesting the camaraderie among each other.

Celebrating *Flores de Mayo* and *Santacruzán* is a meaningful way of showcasing the Filipino culture that depicts the virtues of resourcefulness and creativity, faithfulness, unity in *bayanihan* or the spirit of working together, hard work, and helpfulness as inspired by Montfortian Spirituality and guided by the teachings of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort. It was indeed a leap of faith.

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