



Closing of the Mission à *la Montfortin* Tuburan

CEBU, Philippines – The third Sunday of January is observed as the Proper Feast of the Santo Niño (Holy Child) in the Philippines. However, in the island of Cebu, the feast is celebrated for the whole month of January. The Santo Niño is in fact the most recognizable religious image in the Philippines because it is the oldest one in the archipelago dating back to 1521.

In every Catholic home, office, chapel, *carinderia* or *tiangge*, a statue of the Santo Niño can be found. In the Visayas, the biggest festivals are in honor of the Santo Niño. The feast is a commemoration of the arrival of Christian faith in the Philippines. When Ferdinand Magellan (Fernando de Magallanes) arrived and planted the cross in the shores of Cebu in 1521, claiming it in the name of the King of Spain, he offered the image of the Child Jesus, the Santo Niño, as a baptismal gift to Hara Amihan, the wife of Cebu's Rajah Humabon who was later named Queen Juana after the mother of King Carlos I. The 800 natives were also baptized together with the rulers of the land. This event marked the foundation of the *Sinulog* dances when Queen Juana held the Santo Niño in her arms and blessed her people. Since 1521, the devotion to the Santo Niño has not only grown but is also deeply entrenched in the Visayan culture. Pilgrims from all over Cebu and the rest of the Philippines make their annual journey to partake in the procession and the fiesta.

On this great feast in January 17, 2021, the itinerant mission of the Montfort Missionaries - Philippine Delegation in Tuburan was closed. The mission was formally opened last December 8, 2019, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After eight years, it is the first itinerant mission of the Montfort Missionaries in the Archdiocese of Cebu and the first parish renewal through Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary according to the teachings

of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort. The Tuburan mission was made possible upon the invitation of the clergy of the Archdiocesan Shrine of St. Anthony de Padua to the Montfort Missionaries through Rev. Fr. Rene S. Bustillo, SMM, the Head of the SMM Cebu Mission Team. The town of Tuburan is in the northwest mountainous part of Cebu. It is in the boundary of the towns of Carmen, Danao, Catmon, Sogod and Tabulan. It is a four-hour drive from the Mission house in Minglanilla. Out of the 33 barangays, seven on the east part of the parish were given as part of the mission areas namely Kalangahan, Kamansi, Kaorasan, Bankito, Tomugpa, Kalunging and Amayuga. Some scholastics who were on their pastoral year were part of the team for Tuburan mission namely Bro. John Michael Uy, SMM, Bro. Samuel Gonzales, SMM (both stayed from December 2019 to April 2020) and Bro. Harold Anthony Montoya, SMM (September 2020 to January 2021).

The closing celebration started at 10:00 am with the Holy Eucharist at the chapel of San Isidro Labrador in Barangay Kalangahan. It was presided by Rev. Fr. Paul Arnel Lucero, SMM (Vicar Superior of the Delegation) with Reverend Fathers Rene S. Bustillo, SMM, Federick B. Yumang, SMM, Peter Monteran and Wilfredo Genelazo as concelebrants. The homilist was Rev. Fr. Peter Monteran, the Parish Team Moderator. In his homily, Fr. Peter expressed his gratitude to the congregation especially to Fr. Rene for his availability and self-giving for the Mission in bringing the people closer to God with the awareness of God's love and mercy. He also acknowledged the contribution of the missionaries to re-ignite their sense of community. Even though they felt sad with the closing of the mission, they must go on with their life as Christians and continue to participate in the activities of the community.

Before the final blessing, Fr. Rene thanked the team of pastors of the parish and the people in the mission areas for their fraternal love and care for him as a missionary and their generous support for the mission. He also reminded the people to continue the mission of Christ (*Ipadayon ang Misyon ni Cristo*). After which, Fr. Paul announced to the people the next assignment of Fr. Rene and asked them to continue to pray for him. During the recessional, the presider and the concelebrants led the carrying of the mission cross as the congregation went outside the chapel in procession for the blessing and planting of the Mission Cross.

Afterwards, a sumptuous meal prepared by the people was shared by everyone. After the meal, a short program followed wherein the people presented dances, songs and messages for Fr. Rene as a way of thanking him for journeying with them for more than a year. The celebration was attended by the people from different mission areas, the Daughters of Wisdom, some SMM Scholastics, an SMM collegian and the AMQAH members from Minglanilla, Naga, Kinatarran Island and Cebu City.

The celebration ended around 2:00 pm. The missionaries left the area carrying in their hearts the experience of God's providential care throughout the mission, even in the time of uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are grateful for the opportunity in taking part in the mission of the universal church and the congregation for the realization of the reign of Jesus Christ through Mary for the Glory of God Alone!

Fr. Federick Yumang, SMM