

## **Homily for the Feast of Santo Nino – January 2017**

On behalf of Archbishop Peter I would like to congratulate you on your feast day and thank you as the Filipino community in the Archdiocese of Southwark for the way you live your faith in this country. Your commitment to your families, your faith and your work is an example to all of us. I would like also to thank Fr. Ronan and the Scalabrini Fathers for the wonderful support they give to the Filipino communities in the Archdiocese of Southwark and for all they have done preparing for today's celebration.

As Filipinos you have a religious tradition you can be very proud of. In a sense the Feast of Santo Nino is not just a 'feast' but truly is a 'festival' which includes Church and country, faith and culture. For centuries Cebu has been a major centre of pilgrimage for the people of the Philippines. For us here in London the Feast of Santo Nino is an opportunity to recall and give thanks for that rich tradition of faith you have inherited.

You know, much better than I do, that the origins of the Feast of Santo Nino go back many years. In 1521 shortly after the Spanish arrived in Cebu the statue of the Infant Jesus was given to the Queen of Cebu when she converted to Catholicism. Soon afterwards the Spanish were expelled from the island of Cebu when their leader was killed in battle. Forty four years later the Spanish returned and one of the Spanish sailors found the statue, hidden in a wooden box, perfectly preserved. The discovery of the statue caused a sensation. The Spanish saw it as a sign of the openness of the Filipino people to the Gospel and as a call to renew their efforts to evangelise the country.

A temporary church was constructed to house the image of Santo Nino but that was soon replaced by a bigger church erected in honour of the Santo Nino which as you know means the Holy Child. Years later in 1740 this was to be replaced by a more permanent church. During the Second World War a bomb fell on the church but the image was unscathed. The Augustinian friars who for centuries have taken care of the church built a small marble chapel within the building in which the statue is now enthroned. In 1965 the church was declared a minor basilica.

When we celebrate the Feast of Santo Nino we are reminded that:

- it is the child Jesus who helps us see the presence of God in every person and especially in every child,
- it is the child Jesus inspires us to hope for peace and a better world for every person and for every child,
- and it is the child Jesus who reminds of the dignity of every person and every child.

Your devotion and witness is an example to all of us. Wherever you go in the world (whether to the U.S. or the U.K., to Canada or Australia, Japan or Singapore) you are always loyal to your families, your faith and to the Church. Your strong sense of Catholic identity enables you to value your own culture and at the same time to adapt to new situations and

new cultures. About three months ago I was speaking to a wonderful bishop called Bishop Paul Hinder. He is a Capuchin friar and his diocese in the Gulf is one of the largest geographical dioceses in the world. There are over one million Catholics in his diocese, many of whom live and work in very difficult situations. Every one of them is an immigrant with no right to remain in the country. Many are exploited and badly treated often doing the difficult, the dangerous and de-meaning jobs that need doing. What gives them strength in a very difficult situation is their deep faith, their strong fellowship and the great support they receive from and give to their families. Over ninety percent of the Catholics in his diocese are either from the Philippines or India

Today on the Feast of Santo Nino we pray in thanksgiving for Filipinos throughout the world that they will continue to give witness to their faith through their personal love and loyalty to Jesus, to their families and to their faith.