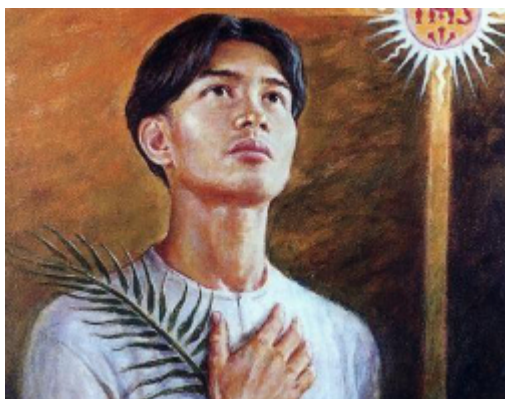


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Sainthood for Filipino catechist highlights evangelization, role of laity

by N.J. Viehland



Blessed Pedro Calungsod (Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Cebu)

MANILA -- This weekend's announcement of the October canonization of Blessed Pedro Calungsod has delighted Filipino Catholics, especially those in the Cebu province, and has driven its archbishop to work for a celebration that would be as meaningful as it is joyful.

"Like every Cebuano [person from Cebu], we met the announcement with such rejoicing that we thought how privileged we are that this new saint is from Cebu and that it happens in our time," Archbishop Jose Palma of Cebu told *NCR* about the atmosphere Monday in his archdiocese in central Philippines.

The Vatican announced Saturday that the 17th-century teenage catechist of the Jesuit Mission to the Marianas will be one of seven new saints canonized Oct. 21. Calungsod will become the second Filipino saint after St. Lorenzo Ruiz, an altar server martyred in Japan while serving in a mission there in 1637. Pope John Paul II canonized Ruiz 25 years ago.

The announcement of Calungsod's canonization was no surprise. Last year, word spread of the promulgation of his sainthood by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints after the Vatican recognized the recovery of a Cebu businesswoman from a deep coma as a miracle obtained through Calungsod's intercession.

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"Even when people had heard and watched the announcement of canonization on EWTN, whenever we repeated the announcement, almost spontaneously the church would thunder with applause," Palma said.

Calungsod was born in 1655 in what was then the Diocese of Cebu, made up of Panay Island in central Philippines and Mindanao in the south as well as the Ladrone Islands in the Pacific, known today as Guam.

He was reportedly killed in modern-day Guam at the age of 17 while trying to defend a Jesuit priest, now Blessed Diego Luis de San Vitores, when natives whose leader rejected Christianity attacked them April 2, 1672. His attacker hit Calungsod with a spear before the saint-to-be's skull was split with a machete. Their bodies were then tied together and thrown into the sea.

Cardinal Ricardo Vidal, former archbishop of Cebu, promoted the cause for Blessed Pedro's canonization, and on Jan. 27, 2000, Pope John Paul II promulgated an official decree of martyrdom for him. Calungsod was beatified March 5 the same year.

Pope Benedict XVI announced Calungsod's canonization through Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, at St. Peter's Basilica on Saturday after the ceremony in which 22 bishops from around the world became cardinals.

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Palma said the Cebu archdiocese had formed preparatory committees in January for preparations in Cebu, for pilgrimages and ceremonies in Rome, and for a thanksgiving ceremony on the pilgrims' return to the country.

Vidal said expenses for Calungsod's canonization activities could surpass the cost of his beatification, which cost 25 million pesos [\$587,000] 12 years ago.

In Cebu, Catholics have long been offering prayers for canonization and thanksgiving at the shrine dedicated to Calungsod. After the canonization date was announced, Catholics trooped to the shrine to pray and light candles.

For Palma, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the canonization is not just a jubilant celebration, but also an "opportunity for grace" for anyone who appreciates the life of saints.

"From the perspective of the fact that he was a catechist, it is a challenge to evangelization," the CBCP president said, noting that Calungsod would be canonized on World Mission Sunday.

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"That's an added dimension to why he was canonized," Palma said. "He evangelized. He went out of the country to reach out to other people to proclaim about Christ. He is a layperson, a young boy who joined the priest as a catechist, and of course at that time, because of various reasons, but primarily because of

animosity towards the faith, he was martyred."

He said Calungsod's life story is relevant to Filipinos and other Catholics today.

"The work of evangelization is everybody's work," Palma said. "For many years, when we think of evangelizing, catechizing or teaching other people about Christ, we say that's the work of the nun or the priest. This is all our work, and that's what makes Pedro Calungsod's canonization at this time more meaningful."

The archbishop cited other parallels between missionary life and struggles people face today.

"When we are inclined to complain or withdraw, just think the martyrs have had to do much more with much less," he said. "That holds true not only with mission to other countries, but even with fulfilling our daily duties. Many of them are not enjoyable, not all is sweet and easy and light. But if they are valuable and good, can we not make sacrifices?"

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Palma and the canonization committees hope to stress these values in the catechesis they will conduct through October. He said efforts include publishing a book containing key information on Blessed Pedro.

"We will be planning so we can make this an opportunity for renewal for all, not only those pilgrims going to Rome," Palma said.

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Others to be canonized with Blessed Pedro include:

- Jacques Berthieu, French martyr and priest of the Society of Jesus
- Giovanni Battista Piamarta, Italian priest and founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Nazareth and of the Congregation of the Humble Sister Servants of the Lord
- Maria del Carmen, Spanish founder of the Conceptionist Missionary Sisters of Teaching
- Marianne Cope, German religious of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis in Syracuse, N.Y.
- Kateri Tekakwitha, American laywoman
- Anna Schäffer, German laywoman

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