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Philippines archbishop 'exposes' story of future saint through multimedia

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NCR Today

MANILA, Philippines -- Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle sat in his usual red armchair and told the story of young Filipino martyr, Blessed Pedro Calungsod, on video.

Tagle, in the video from "The Word Exposed" Sunday television program, tied the story of Calungsod's life, mission and martyrdom to the Sunday Gospel about Jesus sending the apostles out to places in pairs to preach the Good News.

In the seven-minute broadcast over Philippines cable and local television and on YouTube, the archbishop highlighted the struggle of missionaries.

"We know that missionary life never comes easy. It will really challenge you to the core," Tagle said.

However, he adds, "if the mission is fueled by charity, by your love for God, then nothing will be unbearable, as shown by Pedro and his fellow missionaries."

Using video, simple illustrations and graphics, the bishop tells the story of Calungsod, a teenage native of the central Philippines Visayas region who volunteered as a catechist with the Spanish Jesuit mission among Chamorros of Ladrões Islands, now Guam, in 1668.

Tagle narrates missionaries' difficulties there at that time, including irregular arrival of supplies, difficult travel through jungles and rough terrain, and "terror" of frequent typhoons. Still, Tagle noted, members of the mission, led by Jesuit Fr. Diego Luis de San Vitores, persevered and "were able to convert a significant number of natives" until Chinese merchant Choco spread rumors linking the death of infants to

"poisonous" water priests used to baptize them.

In Tumon village, de San Vitores baptized the daughter of chieftain Matapang, reportedly with consent of her Christian mother. Matapang got angry and enlisted a fellow villager, Hirao, to kill the missionaries, Tagle said.

An attacker's spear hit Calungsod, Tagle said.

"He had all the chance to escape, being young and agile. But he refused to abandon his superior, the old Padre Diego," the archbishop said. He noted how the young catechist stayed with the priest and did his best to protect him, taking a spear in his chest and one blow on his head.

Tagle in his video tells viewers, "Pedro Calungsod models for us intense love for mission and love for neighbor. He willingly left family to bring the Good News to some distant place. He willingly gave up his life for his friend. He chose to embody the ideals of Christ. Thus, his mission bore much fruit. Even today, the Christian faith persists in the Marianas."

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He invited his audience to celebrate Calungsod, who was beatified on March 5, 2000, with the whole church Oct. 21, when Calungsod will become the second Filipino saint. Pope John Paul II canonized St. Lorenzo Ruiz, a lay church server, in 1987.

A media team member for the +BIG Saint Pedro Calungsod Movement told *NCR* that Catholics, especially in the Manila region and Luzon Island in the northern Philippines are targeted for information campaigns like Tagle's program, which was produced by Jesuit Communications Foundation Inc.

Clarke Nebrao of the Calungsod movement told *NCR* that according to its April to June survey of Catholic 12 to 40 years old, few people in the lower socioeconomic classes were aware of Calungsod and knew he will become the second saint from their country.

Of the 3,800 Catholic and public school students in Metro Manila, about 23 percent knew of Calungsod, and they were from schools in the upper socioeconomic classes, Nebrao said. Among public and lower-cost schools, only 17 percent had some knowledge of the saint-to-be.

"In Cebu and Mindanao, he is more known, maybe because there were already efforts to inform and educate people there since Pedro Calungsod's beatification in 2000," Nebrao said.

His group's survey found at least 86 percent of respondents in the Visayas "knew a lot about Pedro Calungsod."

He said the movement has planned informative and interactive material and events online in addition to Tagle's "Word Exposed" video. One of them, a Facebook page, had drawn 3,567 likes by Thursday, less than three weeks after its launch.

The website and Facebook and Twitter (@SPCalungsod) accounts will serve as media for information as well as implementation of various Philippines church activities, including The Big Dare for "small acts of kindness" modeled after Calungsod's virtues, a play on his life, a sports run and pilgrims' feast, and thanksgiving Mass.

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