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# Philippines president might not make new saint's canonization ceremony

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**MANILA, Philippines** -- Philippines President Benigno Aquino III will join the National Thanksgiving Mass in November to celebrate the canonization of Blessed Pedro Calungsod, but the president might not be able to make the trip to Rome for the canonization itself, a spokesman said Wednesday.

Cardinal Ricardo Vidal and Archbishop Jose Palma, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, met with Aquino on Wednesday to invite the president to join the Philippines delegation to the canonization ceremony in Rome and the thanksgiving Mass in Cebu in the central Philippines, where Calungsod is believed to be from, spokesman Edwin Lacierda told the media.

Pope Benedict XVI will lead the ceremony in Rome to canonize Blessed Pedro and six other candidates for sainthood on Oct. 21. Lacierda said Aquino's scheduled travel plans could make it difficult for him to join the ceremony in Rome [1], however.

Blessed Pedro's Oct. 21 canonization is significant to the Catholic church in the Philippines as well as to the country as a whole, Lacierda said in reference to the president's participation in canonization-related events [2].

Asked if the public would see Aquino's presence at the thanksgiving Mass as favoring one religious group, Lacierda cited examples of Aquino administration's engagement with various religious denominations. Aquino, 52, is Catholic [3].

Other Christian groups in the Philippines [4] include members of Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ), the Mormon church and other mainline Protestant churches. Followers of Islam make up at least 5 percent of the country's 90 million people, while some Filipinos adhere to Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and other beliefs of indigenous cultural communities.

Lacierda said the Cebu Mass will give thanks for and celebrate Filipino bravery and martyrdom.

Vidal, who heads the CBCP executive committee on the canonization, said the process of canonization started in 1986 during the term of Aquino's mother, President Corazon Aquino, and will end while her son is in office, Lacierda said.

Calungsod was a 17-year-old Filipino catechist serving a mission with a Jesuit priest, Blessed Diego Luis San Vitores, in modern-day Guam when natives who rejected Christianity killed the two of them [5] on April 2, 1672.

Blessed Pedro will become the second Filipino saint after St. Lorenzo Ruiz, another 17th-century lay martyr, who was canonized 25 years ago.

Palma said Aquino's presence at Calungsod's canonization would bring joy to the whole Philippines nation [6].

Under Vidal's leadership, the Philippine church developed a plan for the national celebration of Calungsod's canonization [7]. The five-phase plan engages people in both the Philippines and Rome in catechesis on the saint's life and virtues as well as the mission of the church, liturgical celebrations and the pilgrimage to Rome around canonization time.

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