NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Cardinal Tagle calls for a Christmas of solidarity and communion

N.J. Viehland | Dec. 23, 2013
Manila, Philippines

Cardinal Luis Tagle of Manila has called Filipino Catholics to observe a "Christmas of solidarity and communion" through soul searching and spiritual transformation.

In his message, released this Advent season by the Manila archdiocese, Tagle echoed his earlier calls for people to contemplate Jesus as "God's presence among us."

He wrote that Filipinos can transform to witness to Christ "only with serious soul-searching, review of values, reordering of priorities, and commitment to God, neighbor, country and creation."

He pointed to survivors of recent disasters in the Philippines as people who "will teach the faithful how to see the child promised by God with fresh eyes of faith and hope."

One of the country's most devastating calamities in recent years, Typhoon Haiyan, known as Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, hit landfall in Eastern Samar in the central Philippines on Nov. 8 before sweeping westward and further north through the provinces of Leyte, Cebu, Iloilo and Palawan. More than 6,100 people have died and 27,650 were injured. About 1,800 people were reported missing as of Monday.

Before Haiyan, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake rocked Bohol Province and eight other cities and towns in central and southern Philippines on Oct. 15. Destruction of homes, buildings, churches, bridges and roads from the quake has been estimated to cost $177 million.

Armed clashes had also erupted in Zamboanga City in the southern Philippines on Sept. 9 between Philippines Armed Forces troops and members of a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front that reportedly tried to raise the group's flag at City Hall. The incident, referred to as the "Zamboanga siege," triggered almost three weeks of fighting that displaced an estimated 100,000 people.

In his Christmas message, Tagle quoted a Palo woman who survived the typhoon: "With the ruins around us, this would probably be the first time I would understand and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas."

Her statement "brings us back to the central sign of Christmas: the humble baby in the manger who is truly the Son of God" and the "God who remains with us," Tagle said.

Meaning of Advent

God's promise of salvation through his son has been the theme of most of Tagle's activities for this Advent. On Dec. 8, he shared with more than 15,000 people who filled a coliseum for his Advent recollection how his encounters with overseas Filipino workers, jailed Filipino Christians, and various people affected by calamities echoed God's word and brought light to experiences of darkness.

He recalled a layover in Dubai on his way home from Rome when Filipino workers at the airport came up to

him and told him how much they valued the online and television show "The Word Exposed [1]" because they are not able to go to Sunday Mass. "I suddenly realized these people are away from home, in a foreign land, they miss terribly familiar things, familiar stories, familiar faces," Tagle said.

He said this experience helped him decide to continue appearing in the program broadcast. "If this is my humble way of allowing the light of God to reach people, why will I prevent it," Tagle said.

He said an encounter with a prisoner after a pre-dawn Advent novena Mass in Trese Martires provincial jail was equally enlightening. After the Mass, he greeted prisoners, asking one of them how things were in jail.

The prisoner replied, "Bishop, if you're in jail, you don't know when your next hearing is. It's not certain if you will get a fair hearing. It's not certain if you'll be freed. You're not even sure if your family will accept you. One thing is certain. Jesus loves us. So Christmas pushes through."

Solidarity and communion

Calamities have thrust Catholics in the Philippines and other countries together to raise funds and organize other forms of support for relief to survivors as well as rehabilitation and rebuilding of ravaged areas.

Caritas Manila, the archdiocese's lead Catholic agency for social services and development, as of Sunday reported it had raised $1.7 million in cash donations and an estimated $468,320 in non-cash donations. Its website [2] reports Caritas had provided $1.3 million in emergency relief assistance to 10 provinces.

Three weeks after the typhoon, Catholic Relief Services, the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States, has reportedly raised $15 million in private contributions and aims to raise another $5 million. Governments, Filipino communities and other private groups overseas have also sent donations and service teams.

On Negros Island, northwest of Leyte, HEARTanonymous.org, an initiative of the Order of Augustinian Recollects' Commission on Social and Ecological Concerns, is helping build houses and chapels in partnership with grassroots church communities. About 200 members of the Basic Christian Communities of Linuthangan gathered Dec. 19 for Mass in a chapel they had just rebuilt after Haiyan destroyed it.

"The real essence of community building is people's participation," Carmelite Fr. Gerry Sabado said in his homily.

Mely Flores, program coordinator and outreach director of the University of Negros Oriental-Recoletos, said the project started with "pockets of devastation in the remote areas" and uses "simple criteria" for screening for its rebuilding campaign. Members of the Basic Christian Communities used felled trees for wall panels and pews for the chapels, and local artists painted murals on the altar wall.

At the Philippine Air Force base in Pasay City, south of Manila, members of the women's Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines organized a schedule for nuns to volunteer for assisting the Department of Social Welfare and Development in orienting, welcoming and documenting survivors arriving from Leyte's Tacloban airport.

Sr. Maria Fe Fadrigalan of the Augustinian Missionaries of the Philippines told *NCR* it was "so hard" for her to listen to people's stories of losing loved ones. "Today, the young woman I just interviewed lost five people" in her family. "Sometimes I'm moved to tears even before they share" their story, Fadrigalan said.

Source URL (retrieved on *02/07/2016 - 20:36*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/cardinal-tagle-calls-christmas-solidarity-and-communion

Links:
[1] http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA139F74FF9D862A0
[2] http://caritas.org.ph/