



Homily – Simbang Gabi Massⁱ

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*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
Los Angeles, California
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am honored to celebrate this Holy Mass with you, to begin these nine days of Simbang Gabi, as we get ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ on Christmas Day.

This is a special day for all of us in the Church in Los Angeles, because we are celebrating the rich Catholic faith of our Filipino people, and your deep roots here in our Archdiocese and in our country, which date back to the first evangelization of America, when the first Filipinos arrived here at Morro Bay in 1587.

My brothers and sisters, as you all know, your ancestors were here — worshipping, working, evangelizing, serving the needy, and building our country — almost 200 years before America's founding fathers.

We can never forget this, my brothers and sisters! Always be proud of your roots. Proud of where you come from. Proud of your Filipino history and heritage, your culture and customs.

Your culture is a rich treasure and a beautiful part of who you are, a beautiful part of your Catholic identity, which you are called to live and to proclaim as a light in our society.

This novena of Simbang Gabi, and all of your traditions of piety and devotion, reminds us that the seeds of the Gospel have been sown in every culture, and have produced fruits of holiness and love.

Jesus created his Catholic Church to be one family of God in a communion of cultures, where peoples of every race, nationality and language could live as brothers and sisters and as children of God.

And that is what the prophet Isaiah is talking about in the first reading we heard today in this Holy Mass.

The prophet tells us that the day will come when the children of God will spread abroad to all the ends of the earth, and will possess every nation. And Isaiah gives us this image of the children of God unfolding a great tent that will cover the whole world.

My brothers and sisters, this prophecy has been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and his holy Catholic Church, which is a universal family spread out over all the earth.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI teaches us that “the Church is God’s family on earth.” And he says that the Church bears “witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son.”ⁱⁱ

So that is who we are, my brothers and sisters. We are children of God! We are one family in Jesus Christ! What a wonderful identity and inheritance — to be God’s own children, to be God’s own sons and daughters!

My brothers and sisters, this is the meaning of Christmas, which we are preparing for in this time of expectation, penance and conversion during Advent. At Christmas, Jesus comes as a Son of Man so that we can become sons and daughters of God. Jesus shares in our humanity so that we can share in his divinity.ⁱⁱⁱ

So today in this holy Mass, let us rejoice in this gift of Jesus Christ, who is the greatest gift we could ever receive, the *Aguinaldo* of our Heavenly Father. And let us give thanks for the precious gift of our Catholic faith — and for our parents or other special people in our lives who introduced us to Jesus and his Church.

None of us came to our faith alone. Faith begins with God’s love for us and his call for each one of us to share in his love, to live in his love. God calls to his children through the preaching and ministry of his Catholic Church and through the witness of those who believe in Jesus Christ.

And my brothers and sisters — now it is our turn! We must be the ones who share our Christian faith with the people of our generation. Each one of us, must take personal responsibility for the mission that Jesus gave to his Church — to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every nation under heaven.^{iv}

You see, my brothers and sisters, our faith is a gift. But it is also a duty. The duty to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in our lives.

That is one of the lessons of the Gospel reading for today’s Holy Mass. Again, our Gospel reading presents us with the figure and person of St. John the Baptist.

John was a witness to Christ. And each of us is called to be a witness too. Like St. John the Baptist, we are called to help our neighbors to recognize the presence of Jesus Christ among us. We are called to tell them the beautiful truth that God loves them and that he has a plan for their lives.

The people of our times are hungry to know Jesus Christ. They long to make contact with him. They long to know his love and his power in their lives. So we are the ones who must be the messengers, to prepare the way for them to see the Lord.

And that is the theme for our Simbang Gabi devotion this year: “Jesus, Our Light, Ignite Our Hearts to Evangelize.”

As I said, evangelization is not an option for us. It is our joyful duty as children of God. Our work in our lives is to continue Jesus’ work. We are called to be instruments in God’s loving plan for the world. We are call to invite others to this beautiful family of God, his holy Church.

So let us pray for the light, the inspiration and the courage to be like St. John the Baptist, to be holy and to be evangelists.

And my brothers and sisters, I urge you: deepen your contact with the roots of your faith in the Catholic spirituality of your Filipino culture. Be proud of your faith and rediscover the beauty of your traditions and values. And share those traditions with the people of our times.

Know the lives of your Filipino saints and seek their intercession and guidance often.

Among the tapestries hanging in our great Cathedral, we have a portrait of your first Filipino saint, St. Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila. I am sure many of you know his story very wel. He was a good husband and father and a lay minister in his Church who was driven into exile in Japan, and was martyred there in an anti-Christian persecution.

St. Lorenzo Ruiz suffered tortures we cannot describe, but he held fast to his Catholic faith. And his confession of faith should be something that each of us feels deeply in our own hearts. He told his torturers: “I am a Christian and this I profess until the hour of my death. And for God, I shall give my life.”^v

St. Lorenzo Ruiz, pray for us! That we might have the courage to follow you in living our Catholic faith, and proclaiming it in our society.

So my brothers and sisters, as we enter into these nine days of expectation, let us ask Our Lady of Antipolo and Our Lady of Manaoag and Our Lady of Guadalupe to help us to have hearts to evangelize and to tell the world about the love of Jesus Christ, who comes to us on Christmas Day.

ⁱ Readings (Thursday of the Third Week of Advent): Isa. 54:1–10; Luke 7:24–30.

ⁱⁱ *Deus Caritas Est*, 19, 25.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Pet. 1:4.

^{iv} Mark 16:15; Acts 2:5.

^v O’Malley, *Saints of Asia* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2007), 150.