



## **A GRACE- FILLED PAST JOURNEYING TOWARDS A PEACEFUL FUTURE**

By: Most Rev. Leopoldo S Tumalak, DD, AMI Convention, 11-16 Sept 2011, Sulo Hotel, QC, Philippines

It was SUN TZU, the ancient Chinese Philosopher in his now-classic treatise, THE ART OF WAR which was written more than 2,500 years ago who said:

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

Indeed, there are two important things we need to know in our field of work; self-knowledge, which allows us to know our own strengths and weaknesses, our lights and shadows in the accomplishment of our mission; and knowledge of the enemy, that is, the human and societal factors that hold us back in the performance of that mission.

The Military Ordinariate of the Philippines (MOP) is celebrating its silver anniversary this year. And as a gift to our faithful, the uniformed and armed men and women in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), The Philippine Coast Guard(PCG), the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), and the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), we held and concluded our first diocesan Synod last July 18-22, 2011. We wanted to know how to move forward; and the Synod was our secret weapon. By knowing our grace-filled past, we could move on towards a peaceful future.

The Synod culminated (2) years of survey, consultations and prayerful

deliberations. We gathered as one to reflect on the lights and shadows of our life as a Diocese. We looked back and revisited our rich beginnings. The diocese was conceived with shared eagerness between both the Philippine Government and the Vatican; there was a mutual thirst for moral and spiritual upliftment of our men and women in uniform.

Full of zeal for spiritual welfare of the AFP, Manuel L. Quezon, then the President of the Commonwealth Government in 1935, wrote to Fr. Edwin Ronan, a retired World War 1 veteran and a Catholic priest of the Passionist Congregation. He said:

“I am very much interested in the organization of the Chaplain Service, not only because of the National Defense Act so authorizes, but also because I am deeply convinced that religion is a moral force of incalculable value for good, and I am determined to take every precaution that will guarantee to our army the whole benefits contemplated by the creation of this service.”

Taking note of the President's letter to Fr. Ronan, the Philippine government created the AFP Chaplain Service under the National Defense Act of December 31, 1935. In response, Pope Pius XII created on December 8, 1950 the Military Vicariate of the Philippines (MVP). The Pope declared:

“In order to provide more adequate and efficient spiritual care for the Catholic members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Holy See has established the Military Vicariate of the Philippines.”

The mutual agreement became formal on March 28, 1952 when the Philippine Government and the Vatican exchanged a Note Verbale officially recognizing the MVP as the Chaplaincy arm of the country – the source of the country's Catholic military chaplains. During that period, the AFP only comprised the Philippine Army (The Philippine Constabulary). The Catholic men and women in uniform were under the care of the MVP for their spiritual and moral upliftment. Finally, on July 21, 1986 Pope John Paul II elevated the

MVP into a full-blown Diocese called the Military Ordinariate of the Philippines (MOP).

### The Need for a Synod

Equally concerned with the spiritual welfare of the uniformed men and women in the AFP-PNP-PCG-BJMP-BFP and inspired by the eagerness of his 132 Clergy, Bishop Leopoldo S Tumalak, DD, current MOP Bishop was convinced with the idea of holding the MOP's first synod the occasion of its silver jubilee celebration.

On May 16, 2009, the Bishop explained his plan to a few clergy in a meeting at his office in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City. There were two more preparatory meetings on May 16 and 26, 2009 with some other clergy to widen the consultation process.

The Chaplains discussed four (4) major reasons for holding a Synod:

1. The MOP faces some challenges today. The AFP Chaplain Service was created in 1945 with only one branch of service – the Philippine Army (Philippine Constabulary). Today, the Chaplain Service serves different units: the AFP, PNP, PCG, BJMP and the BFP. There is a need for a more responsive pastoral management. The population has increased, and to date only 132 Chaplains minister to the MOP Faithful spread throughout the entire archipelago.

2. In dealing with the increase and movement of peoples, the Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) held in Manila in 1991 had also challenged dioceses to revisit their Faithful, to consult them, to listen them, to sit down

with them and formulate new pastoral programs. In this light, the MOP, being a personal diocese, is especially to convoke a Synod.

3. Today's culture of materialism and the rise of technology which have affected us individually and as an institution are to be addressed too.

4. This Holy Synod makes us more aware of the importance of working together through a mutual sharing of personal experiences and financial resources. Only by fraternal communion can the MOP face these challenges.

5. Realizing the significance of these points, I proceeded by appointing the members of the Synod Preparatory Committee. There were consultations on various levels for a span of two (2) years: among my advisers, my priests' council, my five (5) districts, and fifteen (15) vicariates; there was consultation among my entire clergy, a combination of 125 chaplains in the active service and among some civilians and retired clergy in the MOP.

From August to December 2010, the 1<sup>st</sup> round of consultations was held in the camp / parish level throughout the country. Some 4,650 questionnaires (93 MOP chapels) were distributed among five (5) districts and fifteen (15) Vicariates; 3,140 questionnaires returned; these were analyzed and thematized by statisticians. From these, some thirteen (13) preparatory papers were made.

The synod was attended by some 350 delegates from among the uniformed services and the civilian sector. We produced seven (7) Decrees and 37 new norms for the MOP. The Decrees are: (1) A **DECREE ON WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS SERVICE**: we saw the need for a Common Liturgical Formation, and we resolved to hold meaningful Celebrations Build Up a Community; (2) **A DECREE ON PASTORAL CARE AND MINISTRY**:

we saw the need for more apostolic zeal and we resolved to bring out the Good Shepherds in Us; (3) **A DECREE ON RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION:** we saw the need for Catechesis, and we resolved to become better Teachers, Servant-Leaders, Officers and Models of Holy Life; (4) **A DECREE ON SPIRITUAL DIRECTION, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING:** we saw the need to Design New Counseling Techniques, and we resolved to enhance Family Values; (5) **A DECREE ON SOCIAL LEADERSHIP AND CONCERNS:** we saw the need to Improve Relief Services and other Charitable Missions, and we resolved to enhance the Value of Empowerment, Solidarity and Charity; (6) **A DECREE ON FORMATION AND ADMINISTRATION:** we saw the need of Continuing Formation of MOP Administrators, and we resolved to attune to the Signs and Times; and, (7) **A DECREE ON ECUMENISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE:** we saw the need to Give Witness to Inter-faith Unity and solidarity, and we resolved to enhance Value of Unity and Love Towards Other Religions in the MOP.

As a good shepherd tends to the flock by leading them to good grazing land, so that Synod brought out our strengths and weaknesses to keep us strong in our journey. Now, we know where we are. Now, we see our direction. Now, we know where we are journeying to. Now we could journey towards a peaceful future.

That Synod revealed a new breath of the Spirit that certainly promises a strengthening of the Life and Mission of the MOP Church.

That Synod prefigured the Emmaus event in the MOP as a Diocese that journeys with the uniformed services of the Philippines. As the two disciples were conversing about the event in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared,

talked and walked with them. When they recognized him, they urged Jesus strongly: “Stay with us” (Luke 24:39).

With the same urgency as that of the two disciples, we asked Jesus to “stay with us” in our journey. Our journey is through rough roads and we need him to join us. We need his presence in our ministry. We needed to see and recognize his face in the word that we proclaim, in the sacraments that we administer and in the faces of people we attend to. And it is our prayer that the faithful we care for see, too, and recognize the face of Jesus in us, their shepherds. This mutual recognition of Jesus’ face will leave no one unattended to. The shepherds and the flocks will care for one another.

At table in Emmaus, as Jesus blessed and broke the bread, the two disciples recognized him. They recognized him as he ministered to them at the table of the Eucharist. Awhile ago as they were walking on the road his voice and his words had sounded familiar, but they never thought they were his; however, their hearts were burning, they felt strongly.

Then Jesus was gone, but he left them the fire of new zeal that kept their hearts burning even more. They had met Jesus; they had seen his face, and their outlook changed. Their life was never the same again; they left their home and followed the Lord with no thought of turning back.

We had prepared for the Synod for some time. The two years of preparation had been our walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. There were questions of the relevance of a synod or its timeliness. There were hands holding us back and which made us for a time hesitate. But yet we walked on and as we did, somehow, we heard his voice from the reality that daily confronted us: WALK FORWARD, REFORM, RENEW; “ECCLESIA

SEMPER REFORMANDA EST.” We heard a challenge we could turn our back from. It was a challenge that kept our hearts burning till Synod preparation, i.e., the surveys, meetings and debates, writing and editing, consultations were done.

We have become a Church ready to be sent as it is ready to be reformed. We are a church ready to leave the old home of Emmaus and go back to the New Jerusalem, in peaceful journeying to the future.

Let the words of the Virgin Mary be ours also as we follow the direction the Spirit has given us this convention:

**“I AM THE SERVANT OF THE LORD. BE IT DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.” (LK 1:38)**