

REFLECTION FOR THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION
"PISTA NOON AT NGAYON"

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As is clear from the theme for this year's Fiesta, the Ateneo Community is being invited to look back to the past in order to rediscover and reaffirm the significance of the historical and cultural roots of this important event. It is hoped that by so doing, we will attain a better understanding of our present situation and of the challenges we face as we continue to move forward to an uncertain future. This on-going effort of the Ateneo as a Filipino school to promote a deeper awareness and appreciation of our national identity and cultural heritage will focus our attention on a very important but often neglected sector of our community--our brothers and sisters among the tribal minorities, whose own festive traditions remind us of the deep roots we have as a fundamentally religious people.

While many of us may tend to think of fiesta as peculiar to the type of Christianity which we inherited from Spain in the sixteenth century, a study of the culture of pre-Spanish times shows that this is not so. As we have learned from our tribal brothers and sisters, religious celebrations similar to what we now call "fiesta" had been a part of the lives of our ancestors for centuries before the Spaniards set foot on our shores. As a religious people, these forebears of ours acknowledged their basic dependence on "divine beings" and expressed this sense of dependence thru rituals of thanksgiving, petition and appeasement at significant moments in their lives. Planting time and harvest time were celebrated thru joyful religious rites whereby they besought "God's" blessing and gave thanks for a bountiful harvest. Other ritual celebrations met their need to implore divine help in times of widespread sickness and natural calamities while at the same time seeking reconciliation for any offenses the community may have committed Him.

While it is true that each religious ritual had its own specific theme or motif -- thanksgiving, petition, appeasement, etc. -- as religious rituals, all of them served to deepen the community's sense of security by maintaining a meaningful relationship with the "spirit world" on which their basic well being depended. One of the main fruits derived from this network of religious beliefs and practices was a corresponding sense of hope based on their experiences of "divine benevolence" throughout their stormy history. And it was this sense of hope, whether conscious or explicit or not, that enabled them to face the uncertainties which the "mystery of Life" held in store for them.

Owing to the basic nature of man as a conscious being, hope has always played a vital role in the fundamental dynamic of living a "meaningful life." As a being which, as it were, "creates" its own future through the choices and decisions of each day, without hope and a solid basis for that hope the creative energies which propel man forward to his ultimate destiny would remain

basically stagnant. The common tendency to withdraw from life's challenges or to remain passive in times of crisis or even to terminate one's own life in difficult times are all born of despair. The horrible specter of a "dead end" paralyzes man and renders him impotent. And it is here perhaps, more than any place else that man's basically religious nature manifests itself. For if hope is to be any thing more than just wishful thinking or self-deception a mature and balanced relationship with God as the ultimate guarantor of a meaningful outcome to a life that often times seems to be going nowhere is absolutely essential.

Living as we do in a highly secularized world, where human achievements and ingenuity have opened up breathtaking possibilities for progress and development in almost every aspect of life, the readiness of "modern man" to acknowledge and celebrate his utter dependence on God for a meaningful life has diminished considerably. This truth has not left our own historical and cultural development untouched. A rapid overview of the evolution of our fiesta celebrations will show that this is so. More and more our fiestas have become secular celebrations, an escape from our humdrum daily existence, with only a more or less reluctant nod being given to their once basically religious nature. While it is true that certain religious activities have been preserved in this connection, it is likewise true that the secular aspects of our celebrations often receive more of our time and energies.

If this observation is valid and if it is true that religious belief is the basic source of that radical hope every reflective and critical person needs to live a meaningful life, then perhaps the secularization of our fiestas is a sign that many of us have lost sight of the fundamental basis of our hope for the future. It would be well for us therefore to take time and ask ourselves, just what is the point of this fiesta? What is the significance of the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption? Where does this apparently irrelevant reality fit into the over all picture of the cares and concerns that constitute the more concrete dimensions of our daily life?

Perhaps we can find the key to the "Mystery" we celebrate at this time and discover its meaning for our lives by reflecting for a moment on a very important passage in *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church." There the Fathers of the Council tell us: "In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the image and first flowering of the Church as she (the Church) is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise, Mary shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come . . . as a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God." Much of the confusion, uncertainty and insecurity that we experience throughout our earthly lives are manifestations of the reality referred to in the conciliar expression "pilgrim People of God." For the expression reminds us that "we have not here a lasting city." We are a people on the move. We are a people with mission. We are a people with a task that has only just begun and which will only be completed at the end of our human history. We are all aware of the fact that we are not yet what we should be, that there is much more for us to do and become both as individuals and as a people. We are also aware that despite all our good intentions and significant talents, the road ahead is very rough and filled with unknown dangers. We have all been tempted at times to just give up for very often the struggle does not seem to be getting

us anywhere. Side by side with every victory or step forward, other forces apparently stronger than ourselves seem to divert us from our path and even drive us back a step or two. The resultant fatigue and discouragement are, at times, almost too much to bear.

As a man very much in touch with the world of our times, Pope John XXIII was very much aware of the fact that the situation described above often leads us to despair. Himself a man, radiant with a joy born of unshakeable hope, he once expressed his own belief that the greatest sin of Christians today is to lose hope. For he also believed that we, of all people on the earth, have every reason to hope. We alone, of all the people on the earth, have a concrete basis for hope. We alone know, without doubt, that as a great Christian mystic, Juliana of Norwich once wrote, "all things will be well, all things will be well; every manner of things will be well." What is this basis for hope? The three basic truths of our Faith: the Incarnation, the Resurrection of Christ and the Assumption of our Lady. For these three truths concretize for us God's total and irrevocable commitment to the victorious outcome of the various tasks He has entrusted to our care. By becoming man and passing faithfully through the Horrors of His Passion and Death, Jesus has conquered, once and for all, the forces of sin and death in all its forms. In raising Mary to glory in the fulness of her humanity, He gives us every assurance that if we, like Mary, persevere in the task we have received of transforming the earth for the benefit of every man we too shall share in the glory that is her's today. For she is the model of the Church, the symbol of all that we are called and therefore are enabled to be. Her victory is our victory if we, like her, will be not just "hearers of the word but doers."

Let us then open up our minds and hearts to the warming, healing life-giving splendor revealed in Mary's Assumption into Heaven. Let us renew our faith in the promise of glory that this "Mystery" offers to each and everyone of us today in the midst of all the fear and suffering that surrounds us, no matter how difficult and hopeless things may appear at times to be. Strengthened by this hope that has been entrusted to us, let us renew our commitment to the particular task that still lies before us to bring to fulfillment the unforgettable experience of Mary's maternal love and concern for us as a people that took place during the "EDSA Revolution". In this way we will not only be in full harmony with the historical and cultural roots of fiesta tradition, we will actually be contributing to its evolution as we bring to it a new level of human hope. In this way we will be able to bring about that deeper level of understanding and cultural solidarity that we also hope to achieve through our fiesta this year with its very relevant and challenging theme: "*Pista Noon at Ngayon.*"