

**A Reflection on the Occasion of the Re-interment of
Abp Luis V del Rosario SJ DD
Antonio F Moreno SJ
Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception,
Archdiocese of Zamboanga, 31 July 2010**

This year we celebrate 100 years of being a local church – 33 years or a third of the 100 years were under the pastoral care and leadership of Abp Luis V del Rosario. He was 1) longest serving prelate of this Archdiocese; 2) the first Filipino bishop of Zamboanga, and of the entire island of Mindanao; and 3) the first Archbishop of Zamboanga.

He was born in 1886 in Binondo to Anacleto del Rosario and Valeriana Valdesco. His father became the “Father of Laboratory Science.” He became well-known for processing alcohol from tuba, a process he created for Ayala Distillery for which he won first prize at the Paris World’s Fair. In 1904, Luis studied at the Jesuit Universidad Pontificia de Comillas in Madrid, Spain. There he obtained two doctorate degrees in Theology and in Canon Law. Eight months after ordination in 1910 in Corban, Santander, Spain, he joined the Society of Jesus.



Today is the feast of the Founder of the Society of Jesus – St Ignatius of Loyola. It is but fitting that a true son of St Ignatius, Abp del Rosario, would come home to his final resting place in the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception which, after World War II, was built during his episcopacy in the See of Zamboanga. I say “true son of St Ignatius” because in some sense he really embodied the Ignatian spirit: 1) **scholarship** (read: excellence) coupled with ministry of compassion, 2) **service** to the Church and 3) **simplicity**.

First, on scholarship. As a young priest, he was a professor of Canon Law and Moral Theology. With two doctorates in Spain, one can easily say he was a first rate scholar, truly a learned and gifted professor. Still, that did not stop him from getting involved in the lives of the poor. While teaching, he was serving as Chaplain of the Philippine General Hospital, and later as Chaplain Bilibid Prison and of the Correctional Institute for Women. He had a soft heart for these people. This is in keeping with the instruction of Ignatius to the Jesuit Theologians who were in the Council of Trent, that is, they were to find time ministering to the vulnerable, the weak and the poor. Ignatius did not want Jesuits to be in the ivory tower – simply theologizing, philosophizing and running

schools and turning a blind eye to the poor and the needy. Nor did Ignatius simply want Jesuits to be immersed in the lives of the poor without regard for learned ministry. The young Father del Rosario was just that: first rate scholar and yet rooted in the lives of ordinary people bringing God to them and them to God.

Second, on service to the Church. Bishop del Rosario succeeded Jesuit Bishop Jose Clos of the Diocese of Zamboanga in 1933. Two Jesuit bishops covered Mindanao in this same year: Bishop James Hayes of the Diocese of Cagayan and Bp del Rosario in our diocese. When he was sent to Zamboanga, he found 25 Jesuits working the Diocese (which was really half of Mindanao). He then invited the Oblates to take over Cotabato and Sulu Archipelago, the Foreign Mission Society of Quebec (aka PME's or Canadian Fathers) to go to Davao and the Columbans and Claretians to Zamboanga and Basilan. This proved to be a wise move as this paved the way to the growth of the local churches, development of the local clergy and eventually greater lay participation. As a result, the Prelature of Davao was created in 1949, Prelature of Cotabato and Sulu in 1950 came to be, the Prelature of Ozamis followed in 1951. He started the minor seminary in Tetuan which generated vocations for the local clergy. In 1956 he invited the Carmelite Sisters to enrich the local church with contemplative spirituality. Growth was phenomenal during his time. In 1936, there were only 65 catechists. In 1958, when we became an Archdiocese, there were 390 catechists, that's 6 times over. In 1936, there were 23 priests. In 1958, there were 3 times more priests. The number of parishes and Catholic schools likewise progressively increased under his pastoral care.

St Ignatius along with his companions founded the Society of Jesus principally "to serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff" – as written in the foundational document of the Society of Jesus before it was approved as a religious order. The key phrase here is "to serve the Lord alone and the Church." Abp del Rosario must have reflected thoroughly on these words. He also knew that it is a heinous crime for a Jesuit to aspire to be a bishop. Ignatius

forbade Jesuit to aspire for ecclesiastical offices. In one of the five simple vows of a professed Jesuit, he will explicitly declare that he will not aspire to become a bishop, and he will report to his superior any Jesuit aspiring to be a bishop.

When he was appointed by the Holy Father to be bishop of Zamboanga, he “served the Lord alone and the Church.” He knew the spirit of Ignatius, a man of the church, a man totally at the service of the church. Much of what we have here now we owe it to Archbishop del Rosario.

Part of this service to the Church was the use of his expertise in Canon Law. He was a member of the pre-Conciliar Commission preparing for Vatican II. He never, we are told, missed a single session of that Council. As a Canon Lawyer, he became one of the key figures in the First Plenary Council of the Philippines. He was passionate when things were not in accord with Canon Law, at times unbending in his interpretation of the ecclesiastical rules.

There is an anecdote of a visiting American Monsignor who asked to be brought to the Bishop’s Residence to pay his respects to Bishop del Rosario. Upon arrival, the Bishop gave him a *suspensio a divinis* – suspension of ministerial faculty because he was riding in a car with women! This was prohibited during that time.

Pope Benedict XVI read correctly the mind of Ignatius in his message to the 35th General Congregation of the Jesuits when he declared: “the Church needs you.” It was a vote of confidence on the part of the Pope. Sinners though we are, the Church has confidence in the Society of Jesus – and thus there can never be any doubt that Jesuits and their institutions must be at the service of the universal and local Church – short of this is contrary to the spirit of Ignatius.

Third, on simplicity. Bishop del Rosario was austere, perceived by many as strict. I was trying to get somebody to speak about his life, but one politely refused me because when they were kids, he was very strict

and he would not go near him. But deep down inside Bishop del Rosario had a personal care which he exhibited to priests and people. He was frugal. When asked about his trip from Zamboanga to Rome: “why do you take third class in the boat?” His reply was: “There was no fourth class.” He was quick to take on the Masses of his priests when they are out. He did not see it below his dignity to take over parishes without parish priests.

Ignatius likewise was simple, not simplistic though. He was single-hearted. His prayer in the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises captures the essence of his simplicity: “Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given them all to me. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.” Your love and your grace are enough for me. Bishop del Rosario must have taken to heart these words. His simplicity was an expression of his spiritual dependence, his spiritual poverty. Only people who hunger and thirst for God will be filled with his love and his grace.

Welcome home Archbishop del Rosario! Scholar. Servant of the Church. Simple. Well done faithful son of St Ignatius. Come share the eternal banquet prepared by Jesus Christ for you.