

**Word of thanks on the occasion of the dedication of the altar of the University Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the blessing of the church**

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Happy Feast of the Most Sacred of Jesus!

Last week when I was at the Jesuit Residence of Ateneo de Manila University, several Jesuits approached and told me about how beautiful our University church is. To their praises, I was tempted to tell them, “Really, I didn’t know it is beautiful.”

FaceBook comments about the Sacred Heart Church are humbling: “Awesome,” “Superlike,” “Wow.” One Grade 5 pupil told her mother when she saw the ceiling lights: “This looks like a hotel.” But one comment I like so much is “God’s gift gayot este to the community.” Indeed, what a beautiful gift to our community on the occasion of our one hundred years here.

I think there can be no better way to begin the Centennial Jubilee Year of AdZU than to dedicate the altar of the University Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and bless the church.

I thank you all for coming. I thank especially His Excellency Bishop Julius Tonel DD of the Diocese of Ipil for presiding and preaching at Mass and leading us in the dedication of the church altar and blessing of the church. I thank the members of the local city council led by Mayor Celso Lobregat for gracing this occasion. I thank Msgr Cris Manongas, our Archdiocesan Administrator, the diocesan and religious priests who concelebrated for their support. I thank Fr Joel Tabora SJ, President of AdDU, for facilitating our recollection today and for his all-out support to AdZU. I thank the Jesuit community, the religious sisters, alumni, parents, guests and the Ateneo academic community for being part of the celebration.

Special thanks to Fr Edwin Castillo SJ who supervised our beautiful liturgy this morning together with the *Sociedad del maga Primer Compañeros* altar servers from the High School, the Liturgical Society who sang beautifully led by Alshamir Arripudin, the AdZU Concert Band conducted by Mr Polly Enriquez, lectors and those who decorated the church. I also especially thank Fr Willy Samson SJ and his team for spearheading the fundraising project of this church.

This church reconstruction is a collegial effort of several groups and individuals: Engr Ruel Gonzales, Construction Manager, Architects Rodel Falcasantos, Bing, Nina and Mark Arce and Ed Chua, the members of the Physical Plant Council – Mr Boboy Valerio, Mr Ariel Delgado, Ms Marievic Montaña, Fr Willy Samson, Fr Edwin Castillo, Mr Mario Rodriguez, Br Raymund Belleza, Engr Aldrin Hitalia, Engr Ronald Serimogan, Engr Vic Tierra, the workers, the suppliers, and Ms Mila Lu and her team for the wonderful sound system. I thank the members of the Board of Trustees led by Engr Efren Wee who supported and approved of the project.

A most special word of thanks goes to our donors, friends and academic community who helped us financially from the piso-piso contributions of our Grade School students all the way to the big and generous donations of our benefactors some of whom would rather not be known in the public *muchas gracias gayot*. Thanks to you roughly 20% of the total expense of this reconstruction was covered. More contributions are yet to come. So, it's still never late to pitch in or add more to your contributions. And to those I have forgotten to thank, God bless you all.

After the services here are over, a brief unveiling of the marker ceremony at the right side of the façade of the church will follow to be done by Bp Julius Tonel, Mayor Celso Lobregat, Engr Efren Wee and myself. For our guests, please join our lunch which is served at the Carlos Dominguez Hall to my left, while the rest can take their lunch in their respective assigned areas.

I end with a brief prayer and thanksgiving to the Lord: “O Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, make our hearts like yours.”