

God Will Direct Our Way

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University Mass for the 39th Anniversary of the EDSA Revolution

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These days when I look back on the EDSA revolution, my recollections are usually bookended by memories of two distinct experiences. The first transpired just across from here, at Berchmans Hall, more than 39 years ago. Cory Aquino had just declared the results of the 1986 snap elections spurious and called for sustained protests against the dictatorship and a boycott of businesses of known Marcos cronies. Some days after Cory's declaration, there was a clamor in the Ateneo college campus for a mass walkout from classes so students could join the almost daily rallies at Ayala Avenue. This was led by our intrepid leaders in the student government, the Sanggunian, including Karel San Juan, now Fr Karel and President of Ateneo de Davao; Chito Salazar, now Dr Chito, PHINMA Education CEO and Ateneo de Manila Trustee; and Risa Hontiveros, now Senator Risa of the Philippine Republic.

Thus it was that the late Wawel Mercado and I, both sophomores and members of the Ateneo Catechetical Instruction League, were going around the Berchmans Hall classrooms, shouting "walk out, walk out!" As we reached the ground floor amidst the crush of students streaming out of the classrooms, we suddenly found ourselves face to face with Fr Raul Bonoan, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and our ACIL moderator. Fr Bonoan's had his arms crossed and he was glaring at us with a very stern face. As Wawel and I braced for the worst, Fr Bonoan shouted at us, "What are the two of you waiting for ... walk out, walk out!"

That memory is one happy, heady bookend to a series of recollections that stream by like book titles scanned along the shelf. Four days of people and prayer power, and the departure of the dictator. The freedom constitution and education campaigns in our ACIL apostolate areas to prepare people for the plebiscite to ratify the new charter. Entering the Society of Jesus together with record numbers of novices joining the Jesuits after EDSA. Mobilizing as seminarians during various coup attempts and moves for charter change during the late eighties and nineties. Ordination to the priesthood at the dawn of the new millennium.

EDSA Dos and Tres. The ebbs and flows of the EDSA legacy through the Ramos, Estrada, Macapagal, Aquino, and Duterte administrations.

At the end of this bookshelf of memories is another bookended event, a more sobering one than the first. It is May 2022, 36 years after EDSA uprising. Yellow has given way to pink, and I find myself missioned at the Ateneo de Naga University. Together with the rest of the Archdiocese of Caceres

clergy, the Naga Jesuits concelebrate at mass with Archbishop Rolly Tirona, a day after the national elections, with hometown hero VP Leni Robredo in attendance. At the end of the mass VP Leni addressed the huge crowd and all but conceded to now-President Bongbong Marcos, telling her supporters to accept the election results but to continue the fight. As I celebrated mass for a dejected and depressed Ateneo de Naga community the following day, I was at a loss for words and could only invoke the words of the Salve Regina. “Hail Holy Queen ... to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning, and weeping in this valley of tears”

On this 39th year after the EDSA revolution, such are the thoughts evoked in my mind and heart by this event, and I’m sure in many of yours as well—a mix of happy and sad, triumphs and defeats, dyings and risings. If I were to stay with the happy memories, I would be irrelevantly waxing nostalgic, part of an old generation in denial about current realities. If we were to dwell on what has been lost, playing the blame game, we give over to hopelessness and despair.

But as always, the eyes of faith allow us to look above and beyond. In the first reading for our mass today, we find the writer of the Book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus addressing the Israelites, a nation that has had its fair share of God-given triumphs and soul-shattering defeats. Through all that they are reminded by the words of Sirach: “Be sincere of heart and steadfast, incline your ear and receive the word of understanding, undisturbed in time of adversity Accept whatever befalls you, when sorrowful, be steadfast, and in crushing misfortune be patient; for in fire gold and silver are tested, and worthy people in the crucible of humiliation. Trust God ... trust Him and He will direct your way”

God will direct our way. As the years pass by and EDSA recedes deeper into history, perhaps we are being invited to see EDSA as one of many milestones along the way, leading us ultimately to God’s way. The People Power revolution was and is a part of our continuing journey of faith, not the end of it. And we say this not simply by way of easy rationalization or empty piety. Even on a secular plane, we know how the great revolutions of history remain unfinished. The French Revolution gave rise to the Reign of Terror and the rise of republics in Europe, soon caught in the conflagration of two world wars and now in the midst of conflict yet again. The American Revolution and the Civil War heralded freedom and emancipation, but even now the US struggles with what democracy means and with the terrible evils of racism and prejudice. If this is true for the great revolutions of history, what more for the revolution of love begun by Jesus and the cross? More than 2000 years after His passion, death, and resurrection, women and men continue to build the Kingdom of justice and peace that Jesus inaugurated.

And so on this 39th anniversary of the EDSA revolution, perhaps we can allow ourselves to be reprimanded as the disciples were in the Gospel for today, with Jesus telling us straight to our faces: “It is not about you, stupid!” As Jesus did with His followers, let us allow Him to direct our attention to our children, our youth, especially our students present here. To our dear students: we look to you with great longing and hope, for we are confident that you, to paraphrase Dr Martin Luther King, are even now continuing to push and tilt against the arc of the moral universe, until it truly bends towards justice. On this EDSA anniversary, on this Jubilee Year of Hope, let our prayer be that all of us, during the short time we are given on this small piece of earth that we call the Philippines, will continue to labor for God’s Kingdom of love, justice, and peace. And in doing so, no matter what the future brings for our country, we are liberated from fear and despair, we move forward happy and hopeful along God’s way.

Mabuhay and EDSA! Mabuhay ang Pilipinas! AMEN.