

Reflection 11 Celebration - Filipino style

To say the Filipino knows how to celebrate is the under-statement of the year. These people generally live life with a passion. This has always puzzled me as the heat and humidity they live with every day of their lives, would have me thinking they may be lethargic or a little subdued at least – not a bit of it. Everything they do is done with a single purpose and a vitality that is tangible and in your face. Simply exercising their faith, though I could never imagine them doing this simply, running a School event, calling to mind some great national hero, and they have many or just enjoying some special occasion, you can be sure it will be celebrated well. The words “going overboard”, as we perceive it to mean, is not in their language but may be we could consider “over the top” as a better expression. Either way I would suggest that much of what Filipino people do could well be classified in either of these two ways.

Family:

Celebrating takes many forms here and we find it expressed through religious ceremonies and family get-togethers. Dancing, feasting, and singing just about covers most methods used to celebrate. Oh how the Filipino just loves to be part of a Karaoke and where ever you go you have to contend with this form of celebration blasting the air ways. (Even Carl showed his talent in this form of entertainment last night) One friend said, ***“We take pride in our culture and know that it is from God that all gifts come and to God all glory is given when we use these gifts to express our joy and happiness in life”*** What a wonderful attitude to have. Hundreds of pesos are spent dressing up the children in authentically cultural costumes for school performances. Kate, who is the Mayor’s secretary, explained that parents will go without to make sure their children are properly decked out and added, ***“As long as our children are enjoying themselves we are happy”***. The children come first which means that the family comes first. This is just one of the many Filipino characteristics I have reflected on in the last few weeks. It does explain some customs that we have difficulty understanding and the fierce loyalty that exists between family groups which rises above even the loyalty to their own country. Celebrating is a way of life and every family rich or poor live it. Previous reflections touched on the way Christmas, Easter and other church feast days are celebrated so you have a flavour of what I might call an innate need to celebrate life.

Dance:

In the last week or so we have had the privilege of seeing some of the Hilongos young people dancing routines and music displays as they prepare for the competition season in Baybay just north of us. The dancing, we were honoured guests at last night, was very deliberate and fast moving. The performers had already practised for several weeks and will continue practising till the 30th May when the big event is due to be put on. Its no wonder the final performance will be fantastically professional. Can you imagine 150 young people dancing together in perfect harmony? They have to complete the whole routine inside five minutes (One of the rules of the competition) so it moves along at a great pace. John and Neil joined us for the first dress rehearsals on the night they arrived from Kabankalan and were very impressed. The array of dazzling costumes and back drops, which would not look out of place in the Sydney Opera House, just takes your breath away. Add to this the beating of the drums and the many other musical instruments accompanying such displays and you have Filipinos celebrating Hilongos style. The power and energy of 150 young people all dancing in unison was exhilarating and even a bit overwhelming. We have seen other kinds of dancing; such as Spanish traditional dancing, which is smooth flowing and very sensual and this tends to be

performed by older folk. The traditional body movements and especially the hand movements make it very Filipino in style. Both kinds of dancing are brilliant and equally enjoyable to watch. Like the Karaoke they don't need much of an excuse to perform and do it any time, anywhere.

Food:

Food is such an important part of Filipino culture that it is always present when celebrating, whether it is a small or big occasion. The whole idea of it being Eucharistic in nature is not too far off the mark and really helps one understand the importance of sharing a meal. The first thing a visitor is offered when entering a home is food, which is the traditional way of saying; you're most welcome. (Mabuhí) While in Davao, I shared with you an experience of a play ground blessing where just a hand full of people were involved after which a feast followed that would have done justice to a hundred strong wedding party. This "going over-board" on the food, I was told, has to do with who the sponsor is and what message they want to send to those present. I am still mystified; however, as there seems always more food than could ever be eaten regardless of the occasion, the word "blowout" seems a fitting description. One fact that did set my mind at ease is that food is never wasted because what is left is taken home by the guests after. Apparently the word "blowout" has something to do with who pays and an example might be, if you're celebrating someone's birthday and you want to take people out and you choose to foot the bill then as far as the guests are concerned this is a blowout. If you have the party at home with just the family and maybe a few friends it's called a salusalu.

Birthday celebrations April 9th:

Let me share with you what was supposed to be just a little salosalu for Frank, which will explain beautifully what I mean by celebration Filipino style. We had arranged to have a small celebration here at our house to honour Frank's birthday and include a few guests who had been so kind to us on our arrival. We thought it would be a good idea to say thank you and maybe it could be a house warming and house blessing at the same time. Fool me! Firstly; tradition demanded that we are wakened at midnight to the melodious hymn singing of the CWL (Catholic Women's League) Frank, in PJ top, gets out of bed totally surprised. Fortunately Carl and I were pre-warned so it was not so bad for us. Frank then had to accept flowers and blow out a candle that each visitor brought with them. The song sung while tis is going on was called "**Blowout your candles**". Then the birthday cake was presented and Frank had to blow out more candles and of course cut the cake. Well we finally struggled back to bed some time after 1am. This was just the warm up for the celebrations that were to come when we had the Bishop and Priests and all our new found friends join us for the big celebration later in the day. Well some forty guest joined us and it turned out to be more of a blowout than a salosalu as we were forced to get caterers in as it all becomes a bit too much for Carl and I. We really did witness celebration Filipino style. The food laid on was incredible and the cost was quite small considering what was on display. No blowout is worth its name with out the lechon (Fully cooked pig; head and all). The miracle is we survived the whole experience without too much trauma. The upshot to all this is that an edict was put out by Carl next day that we are to keep his birthday secret (April 25th – the big 72) as he decides he just would not cope with a salosalu let a lone a blowout. ANZAC day will be celebrated, be assured and Carl will blow out a candle or two, I promise you, but it will be a quiet Australian type. May God's blessings and mercy be on all our fallen Soldiers and we will be thinking of you all back home as you celebrate, Australian style, your National day around the country. Till next time. PXT – Hilongos

