



August 8, 2010

*TO: All my Good Filipino Friends and Parishioners of Olde St. Augustine Church*

*Every year since the Filipinos came together in the fall of 1991 to worship at Olde St. Augustine Church, I have been asked to compose a "MESSAGE" for the annual Summer Sinulog Souvenir Program. This year the message is rather historical and I will title it – "The Tragedy and Triumph at Olde St. Augustine Church". I am now in my 79<sup>th</sup> year and 48<sup>th</sup> Ordination to the Priesthood and before I enter the Heavenly Kingdom, I think it prudent to provide an eyewitness and detailed account of all that happened when a great tragedy struck our 213-year old Church. The events need to be recorded both for our Augustinian archives and for future generations.*

### **THE TRAGEDY**

*On Friday morning on December 11, 1992 at 6:00 a.m. a 90 MPH wind blew down our Church steeple. I personally witnessed torrential winds blow down pieces of our steeple the size of billboards. Pieces fell down and tore open three 150-year old graves on the Bridge side of Church property. Pieces also blew onto the Ben Franklin Bridge (close to the Church by a narrow street), and also stopped traffic and the high speed train line on the Bridge for three days.*

*Turmoil was everywhere. It was a miracle no one was killed as it was the Friday morning rush hour, and the winds were blowing from the West from New Jersey towards the City. Had it been the opposite direction the pieces would have blown down onto 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and many could have been killed or injured.*

*At that moment, all seemed to be total and complete disaster. Let me describe for you what happened from that moment on. I said a few prayers and called the police.*

*The wooden steeple, then 150 years old, was swaying in the wind twisting sideways at least one foot off the perpendicular. It was scary and a dangerous sight to behold. By 9:00 a.m. many officials from the Police, Fire Department, Delaware Port Authority, Insurance people, Diocesan Chancery Officials, City Mayor Officials, many Engineers and Steeplejacks were contemplating what to do.*

*At this point the winds were still clocked at 94 MPH, although the papers reported the winds at Valley Forge at 70 MPH. Many meetings took place and by official decree the steeple had to be taken down as soon as possible. We had a 50-foot hole in the Church roof as the rains kept pouring in without let up for three days. This was the scene that confronted the parish on that fateful morning of December 11, 1992. At that moment, it seemed God had forgotten us. Everything had been blown apart. When would the rains stop, when would help come?*

*Help did come! I publically thanked the entire Filipino community and parishioners, who without my calling or asking for any single person, many volunteers arrived to clean house. Suddenly, there were many Filipino friends and old and new parishioners who showed up. Many left their jobs and formed many "bucket brigades" in the balcony. They swept and mopped floors all day long and into the night. Some went up onto the roof in one foot or water and cleared the drains.*

*All this was seen on CNN Television all over the world. Many people of our Order watched on TV what was happening in Japan, the Philippines, Africa and Europe. Two of our parishioners travelling for the United Nations in central Africa saw their Parish Church on Satellite TV, and a college chum saw the events on an Ocean Liner in the Caribbean!*

*I cannot cite here what everyone did by way of Charity and kindness, but God knows who they are. God also will not forget what you did to help His Church in a time of great stress and need. What I have described is part of history, belongs to the mind of God, and our memories.*

### **THE TRIUMPH**

*Three years later in a packed Church the following account was delivered at the 11:00 a.m. Mass. It was Sunday October 22, 1995, the **FEAST OF THE HOLY CROSS**. "My dear people, we should all reflect upon all the tragic events that happened to our Church three years ago in 1992, and what all this means to us spiritually as individuals, and as a parish community. Over the past three years, all of us have seen so many good things that have happened to make this parish come alive that it makes one wonder what the good Lord has in mind for all of us.*

*The 150-year old hollow aluminum Cross was carried into the Church in solemn procession. The left arm of the Cross has three bullet holes from the "**Know Nothing Riots**" of May 8, 1844, when thousands of rioters roamed through the City and set fire to the Church burning it to the ground. Only the rear wall was left standing with very large letters "**The Lord Seeth**". God is very much a part of our lives and we should thank God individually and publically as a parish.*

*After much delay, negotiations and worry, we have a brand new steel roof, a new steel steeple and a new golden Cross. Our 50-foot hole in the roof has been repaired. All the beautiful paintings on the ceilings, side walls, the Stations of the Cross and the Sanctuary have been restored by methods similar to the Sistine Chapel in St. Peter's in Rome. God never forgets us. He is always right there even when we think He is far away. Today the very same men who three years ago carried the 150-year old Cross into our Church in pouring rain have today carried in triumph the newly restored Cross back into the Church to a new place of honor.*

*I shall close by reminding everyone that in the very center of St. Peter's Church in Rome, there stands the Obelisk which once was a monument to the pagan Emperor Caligula in the Roman Coliseum in ancient Rome where many thousands died for our Catholic Faith. This same monument was later moved to its present location. On the very top of this Obelisk, once a monument to paganism, there is a Relic of the True Cross.*

*The Cross of Christ has triumphed in Rome, the Center of our Faith. The Cross of Christ has triumphed right here at Olde St. Augustine Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA! God bless all of you."*

*Fr. Walter J. Quinn, O.S.A.*

*Pastor – 1990-1999, Olde St. Augustine Church*