
Philippines



Pilgrims came from all over the Philippines and all over the world for the annual Bohol Pilgrimage.

THE BOHOL PILGRIMAGE 2012

Carmen, on the Island of Bohol, Philippines is a famous pilgrimage destination on account its shrine of Our Lady of Fatima. Every year the Society of Pius X organises a pilgrimage to the shrine which departs from Tagbilaran and makes its prayerful way through the vibrant tropical colours of the Philippino countryside for 3 days and 64 km (39 miles) to Carmen (next to the famous Chocolate Hills!).

This year was the 11th year of the pilgrimage. It began with Solemn High Mass at the Bohol Cultural Centre on Thursday 17th May with a record 800 pilgrims from the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, U.S.A. and even Switzerland. There were 11 priests, 8 brothers and novices and 8 sisters and Bethanians.

The second day of the pilgrimage was

the hardest and longest of the three. The endurance of the pilgrims was not only tested by the rolling hills, but more severely, by the torrential downpours which left everyone sodden several times each day. Mercifully, these were always followed by the clear bright sunshine. After the cross is always the resurrection.

Father Thomas Onoda, prior of Our Lady of Victories Priory in Manila, writes of one precious memory:

The most touching moment during the pilgrimage was during a heavy downfall of rain. It was wonderful. I was at the head of the procession saying rosaries with Fr. Valan and a little group of other people. There were about twenty of us far ahead of the others with the children. All of sudden, there

was a bolt of lightning and it started to rain. I knew it would soon become like a waterfall from the sky so I directed our children under a roof along the street. We were singing and saying rosaries waiting for the rain to stop. After many songs and several decades of the rosary, the main body of our pilgrims marched in front of us in the heavy rain. All our children joined them in the rain leaving me almost alone!

An anonymous pilgrim also shared his thoughts in a letter to Fr. Onoda:

+Dear Father, Every step is like a step towards heaven. Walking from Tagbilaran to Carmen, from morning until dusk, for three straight days, combined with all sorts of inconven-

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ences, was worth it. From all the blessing that we receive from our Lord, these sacrifices are not enough to express our gratitude for God's kindness.

Pilgrims are fuelled not just with food but with spiritual talks during the breaks; they are refreshed not just with water but with meditating prayers and rosaries; and they are driven not just by the idea of getting to the destination, but by the idea of directing all their prayers through Our Lady...

When the bedraggled and sun-dried pilgrims reached Carmen, after venerating the statues of Our Lady of Fatima and then, Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Church of San Pedro, all the pilgrims returned to the Bohol Cultural Centre for another Solemn High Mass. This was followed a folk dancing and singing competi-



tion between groups from the different Mass Centres of the Philippines. The Manila youth group won the first prize for the folk dance contest, narrowly beating groups from Iloilo and Davao. Davao won the first prize in the singing contest. There was also a speech contest on the subject of Christ the King and a Marian Joust (a speech contest in praise of the

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The Philippines is an archipelago of 7107 islands. It has a population of 92 million of whom 80% are nominally Catholic.



Rev. Fr. Cacho and Rev. Fr. Couture help carry the statue of Our Lady at the front of the pilgrimage.

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The Church of San Pedro in Loboc is the second oldest church in Bohol. It was originally built in 1602, but was soon reduced to ashes. In 1638, a more formidable edifice was erected which, despite its proximity to a temperamental river, has survived a number of severe floods. Inside the church, you can see some remarkable nave paintings on the ceiling. A Spanish coat of arms can be found in the stone wall near the entrance of the convent. The bell tower of Loboc is about 100 meters from the church. The black Madonna, above the High Altar, is a representation of the secondary patroness of the parish—an early 19th-century image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Spanish, not Mexican, tradition. This niche is beautifully decorated in very finely-carved and gilded wood.



800 exhausted and delighted pilgrims.

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One pilgrim walks her via dolorosa.

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Blessed Virgin Mary).*

Rev. Fr. Couture, the Asian District Superior, thanked the organisers (who make even bigger sacrifices than the pilgrims) and gave his final blessing to bring the glorious three days to a close. Deo Gratias. Ω



"Quick! Come in here. Put on a big floppy hat and sunglasses and no-one will ever know."



"I'm afraid that's all folks ... 'til next year!" The folk dancing team from Davao.