

Written by

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – Devotees to the Virgin of Peñafrancia on Saturday (Sept. 15) in Chicago, Illinois, replicated the fluvial procession in the Virgin's original home in Naga City in the Philippines with one of their own on board a motorized sail boat that traveled a distance of 3.5 miles (5.6-kilometers) of Lake Michigan from north side of Chicago to the south side.

Escorted by a Chicago police motorboat from behind so as not to create tall waves, the privately owned sailboat pulled away from the Belmont Harbor in the north side at about 4:27 p.m. carrying 36 devotees, including this reporter.

Saturday's was actually the 25th year that this annual fluvial pilgrimage on Lake Michigan has been held, according to Roger Odiamar, president of the Chicago-based Confraternity of Our Lady of Peñafrancia.

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As it is done in Naga, during the fluvial procession on Lake Michigan, the devotees on board the sailboat prayed the rosary (Divine Mercy, Holy Rosary, Novena) with the images of Virgin of Peñafrancia and Holy Face (of Jesus Christ) also on board while the majority of the devotees, who could not make it to the fluvial procession, also prayed the rosary inside the Virgin's home, the St. Matthias Church in Chicago's north side, as they await the arrival of the Virgin's image from the fluvial procession.

The devotees with the fluvial procession also prayed for the long life and blessings for the owners of the sailboat, who have been making available their boats for free for the devotees during the last 25 years.

The boat owner, Maria Donatela "Lily" Cruz (nee: Camaya), a retired nurse, and her husband, Dr. Jairo Cruz, a Brazilian-born cardiologist, and two of their three children, Mary Ann Cruz Dichoso, a Registered Nurse married to a doctor, and Junior, also a medical doctor, were on hand to act as crew of the 48-foot sailboat.

The elder Dr. Cruz acted as the helmsman as he guided the helm or the wheel of the 12-year-old sailboat that steered the rudder.

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CHICAGO FAMILY WILLING TO HOST VIRGIN FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS

Mrs. Lily Cruz, a native of Ligao City in the Bicol region, and Dr. Cruz said they are willing to play host to the Virgin of Peñafrancia for the next 20 or so years aboard their sailboat as they have done for the last 25 years.

Last year, their sailboat, St. Francis, was in the middle of Lake Michigan when it was whipped by a very strong wind packing 125 miles per hour and their boat could not move but was safe.

Aside from the Virgin of Peñafrancia, their annual pilgrimage to deliver the “Cross San Damiano” to the nuns of St. Francis Assisi in Mackinac Island, 333 miles north of Chicago in Michigan, is another religious tradition the Cruz family observes. When they take the pilgrimage, they join in the race of sailboats every year during the last 20 years. They won second prize twice in the race and collected a plaque and a little trophy for the feat.

Starting from a shallow 14-foot deep Belmont Harbor, the St. Francis boat maintained a speed of 6 knots (6.9-miles) per hour, which is traveling safely at a low speed. It negotiated the distance of 3.5 miles (5.6 kilometers) that has an average depth of 20 to 30 feet (the middle of the lake is as deep as 100 feet) and covered the distance for almost an hour.

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Its speed is a far cry from the Naga River, where the image of the Virgin of Peñafrancia is loaded on a boat that is pulled by other boats, being paddled, during the fluvial procession that inches its way that covers a distance of about three kilometers (1.8 miles).

Mrs. Dichoso said, "We take every precaution at keeping our guests safe. Our boat is very strong, a 48 X-yacht, and is able to withstand carrying a lot of weight, everyone had life jackets, we carry all the ORC (Offshore Racing Council) safety equipment on board. We had the Chicago Police Marine's permission to carry our passengers. And the Chicago police marine followed close behind us the entire trip to add to our safety."

The Bicol Madonna has been known to have performed miracles, from the beginning in the 17th Century when the Cubarrubias family from San Martin de Compostela, Spain, immigrated to the Philippines with their son, Miguel, who became a priest despite his poor health.

Father Miguel was assigned to the diocese of Caceres in Naga City. Because of his devotion to Our Lady of Peñafrancia, he had a Shrine built in her honor by the bank of the Bicol River

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3rd SATURDAY OF SEPTEMBER FEAST

From a picture of the image of the Blessed Mother found in the slopes of Peña de Francia Mountain in Salamanca, Spain, that he brought with him, Father Miguel commissioned a sculptor to carve a statute. When the image was finished, it needed blood to color it as to closely resemble the original image in Salamanca, Spain. A dog was sacrificed for this purpose and the carcass was thrown into the river. To the disbelief of the people, the dead dog came alive, swam and returned to the house of its owner.

Word spread about the incident and many more miracles have been documented more so about healing of the sick, assistance in other difficult situations and in spiritual healing.

The devotion to Our Lady of Peñafrancia, Patroness of the Bicol Region, has immensely spread not only in the region but also throughout the archipelago. Her feast is celebrated every third Saturday of September. The celebration starts by transferring the Image, referred to as “translacion”, from her Shrine at the Basilica to the Metropolitan Cathedral in Naga City on a Friday, the first day of the novena, where novena prayers are said for eight consecutive nights. On the feast and ninth day on the third Saturday of September, “INA” is brought back from the Cathedral to her Shrine at the Basilica via a fluvial procession at the Bicol River and solemn festivities follow.