

Post Script to the Editorial, [Why Not All Filipino Catholics Are Christians](#)

Within minutes after posting today's editorial, I received an e-mail from one of my relatives, Angelica (de los Reyes) Pascual-Tomas. She said that the editorial was "very unchristian, as I condemned in it most of the Filipino Catholic bishops and their priests." Ms. Angelica told me, "Who are you to condemn the Filipino Catholic leaders?" Besides, she said that when penitents ask for forgiveness at the confessional, all that the world needs to know is the meaning of forgiveness. She asked if I have read Matthew 18:21-35?

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I told her that I would reply to her statement by publishing a post script to the editorial.

Yes, the gospel that is stated in Matthew 18:21-35 starts with this narrative: "*Peter approached Jesus and asked him: 'Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I say to you, not seven times but 70 seven times . . .*"

A few years back, one of my two ninangs (sponsors) in the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NaFFAA), Dr. Joy Bruce, and I exchanged views online on the subject of forgiveness. Dr. Bruce is the founding president of the much-admired National Alliance to Nurture the Aged and the Youth (NANAY) of Miami, Florida. (My other NaFFAA Ninang was Ms. Elsa Bayani of Arkansas.) Dr. Joy has been urging me to forgive the NaFFAA founding people for whatever wrongs they might have committed against my person and our coalition. She opined that forgiveness does not carry any precondition. On the other hand, I argued that those asking for forgiveness must make amends, do retribution as penance or else they would become the Filipino versions of "The Unforgiven," the Clint Eastwood movie.

But following Matthew 18:21-35, perhaps indeed, Dr. Bruce and Ms. Angelica are right.

Written by Bobby Reyes

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Absolutely right.

I remember a homily delivered on Sept. 11, 2005, at a mass that preceded the second of a nine-day novena for the Lady of Peñafrancia, as sponsored by the United Bicolandia-Los Angeles (UBLA). The Rev. Fr. Jose Ilagan delivered the homily. He was a visiting priest from Batangas and was then helping at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church (IHMC) in Santa Monica Blvd. in Los Angeles, California. The IHMC – for the first time then in its 95-year (now 98-year) history – has a Filipino-American pastor, Rev. Fr. Rodel Balagtas.

Rev. Fr. Ilagan said that forgiveness should start with the person him/herself. Because people often say to themselves, "How can I forgive myself for doing this or doing that?"

While listening to Fr. Ilagan's animated homily, I started to put my thinking cap on. Perhaps I told myself, the reason the Philippines goes from one crisis to another and from one EDSA-type revolution to another – is that Filipinos have never learned to forgive. And yet everybody likes to call the homeland as the only "Catholic – or even 'Christian' (sic) – country in Asia."

"Forgiveness should start with the person himself or herself. Because people often say to themselves, 'How can I forgive myself for doing this or doing that?'"

Many Filipinos are still blaming the Spaniards for executing the Filipino national hero, Jose P. Rizal, and for abusing the country for 333 years. Many Filipinos still blame the United States for taking over the archipelago as a colony and for killing nearly a million Filipinos during the Filipino-American War. Filipinos have not forgiven the Japanese government for its atrocities committed during World War II when more-than a million Filipino souls gave up their lives. Many Filipinos have not yet forgotten and forgiven the supposed crimes against them by some of their dead and living Presidents.

And today, almost seven years after the September 11, 2001, tragedy at the World Trade Center in New York, at the Pentagon and at Pennsylvania, Americans and the world at large have not forgotten that "day of infamy." And many have not forgiven the suicide bombers for their acts of terrorism. In fact, the world has fielded a coalition of many countries to go after the roots of the terrorists in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

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If we go by St. Matthew's gospel, would it be proper for the United States, the Philippines and a host of countries peopled by Christians of many denominations to start forgiving all those that "sinned" against them? And do Christians not say, "Vengeance is not mine but the Lord's?"

Perhaps today, which is already Easter Sunday in the Philippines, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, her family, her Cabinet officials and congressional and local-government allies may begin the healing process. Perhaps, following Rev. Fr. Ilagan's homily, they might start to forgive first themselves for all the alleged wrongdoings they have done for their constituents so that the Filipino people can also forgive them. Perhaps the Filipino people ought to forgive first themselves for tolerating corruption in the first place. But then, as I have been saying, forgiveness implies repentance and restitution. Without doing restitution, penitents are just mocking forgiveness by merely being sorry for the sins that they have committed against God and the people. To do so would mean false piety and would go against the very meaning of Easter Sunday.

What say you, Dear Readers? # # #

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