

Harmony Prayer: Interfaith Solidarity Prayer for Peace in Marawi

By: Alfrein O. Quirionez

**“Oh Lord I cry for peace.
Purify my eyes to see peace.
Purify my mind to understand peace.
Purify my heart to love peace.
Purify my memory to work peace.
The peace that comes from your love and compassion.”**

This *Harmony Prayer* has been prayed for peace since year 2000 when *Fr. Sebastiano D’ambra, PIME, founder of the Silsilah Dialogue Movement* composed it during the *All Out War* in Mindanao declared by former *President Joseph Ejercito Estrada*. It is also the same prayer being used many times by religious and government *Muslim* and *Christian* leaders in *Zamboanga City* when the siege in 2013 took place for almost three weeks. And now, it is also the same prayer that gathers people who believe in the spirit of the *Silsilah Dialogue Movement* to pray for the peace in *Marawi City* where it is being under siege up to this moment by this certain *ISIS* inspired group which is known as the *Maute*.

This is the time where I consider that building dialogue and peace between the *Muslims* and *Christians* is once again being tested to its fullest. This is the time where prejudice, suspicions, mistrust and hatred towards each other may spark once again to build the walls of otherness and differences. This is the time that causes much division to the people politically and morally in terms of the issue on the preservation of the rights of everyone under the declaration of *Martial Law* by *President Rodrigo Duterte* in the whole island of Mindanao. This is the time where dialogue and peace in Mindanao seem to become merely a dream and concept for many who still wish for them to happen.

More than being as a coordinator of the *Silsilah* in Manila, and at the same time, in the *Ministry for Interreligious Dialogue of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene*, I feel like being one with them in their suffering and struggle as a *Mindanawon*, as a human being who belongs from the same human family, and above all as their brother in most gracious, merciful, loving and compassionate God whom He takes us always as His beloved.

I ask myself in this difficult time where the building of more bridges for dialogue and peace becomes more real where our *Christian* brethren who are minorities in Marawi are being run after by the *Maute* group, while our *Muslim* sisters and brothers are also fleeing away to the nearby cities to find refuge from the fear of being caught up in the middle of crossfire between the military and the said bandits: “What else can I do for the people of Marawi as a person who is miles away from the battlefield?”. And as I let the silence in me to unfold the answer to my question it makes me feel the urgency to call my *Muslim* and *Christian* friends in Manila to gather altogether to call for prayer and be one in prayer for peace in Marawi.

It is indeed true that in times of divisions and conflicts something beautiful can also happen. My initiative to organize a simple ***Interfaith Solidarity Prayer for Peace in Marawi*** on ***May 26, 2017*** at the *Ministry for Interreligious Dialogue office-Quiapo Church* has been quickly responded by my few but

committed Muslim and Christian friends in Manila. It was attended by Msgr. Hernando Coronel, rector and parish priest of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene, my officemates, my Muslim friends in Quiapo led by Haji Ali Alawi, the Muslim coordinator of the Silsilah Forum Manila, the Silpeace Club Manila which is composed of Muslim and Christian youth and some members of the Basic Ecclesial Community of Quiapo Church.

In that special moment of unity and solidarity who could have thought that the usual small office of the Ministry for interreligious dialogue in the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene could turn out into a “harmony room” where both Muslims and Christians shared altogether the solemn atmosphere of the Harmony Prayer to symbolize the gesture of unity in the midst of divisions and conflicts in Mindanao? And now, perhaps, I start to understand more clearly about the meaning of what Fr. Hermes Sabud, SM the Christian coordinator of the Silsilah Forum Davao told me during our recent gathering in Zamboanga City: “There’s always an open door for peace and hope.” And I think, in my own way, I found it this time through my simple initiative to call for prayer that I just realized in the silence where God starts clearly dialoguing with me.

Sometimes, I come to ask myself if where do our many prayers for peace go? Do our prayers being heard? Are prayers really effective? Nevertheless, the wisdom of Fr. Seb who has been working for peace in Mindanao since 1977 would remind me every time I tend to forget, and every time get impatient on the reality of the mission that I started to embrace with, that God is really guiding our history in His own way and we will see the result in His own time. There may still so many things that I don’t understand, but for now I leave it to God to answer me at the right time.

This is the time that there may be a lot of forms of violence that we see around, but this is also the time that we should not close our eyes for us to see that there are also good things that can happen. As Fr. Seb would say: “In times of crisis and suffering not only violence and the worse emerge, but also goodness and the best in people.” And **to call for prayer and to be one in prayer for Marawi** is one way of showing our goodness and concern from here in Manila for our sisters and brothers in Marawi. Goodness can still be everywhere; and therefore, so long there’s still goodness in people there will always be a hope for peace like when the Muslims on the road to Iligan meet the generosity of the Christians as what Fr. Joel Tabora, S.J., President of the Ateneo de Davao University would put it in his tweeter account.