

Public Devotions



"I am rediscovering in the Philippines the importance of signs to taste, to touch and get to know God in me."

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Last night I came back home in taxi. On the dashboard was a statue of the "Santo Nino" – the Infant Jesus of Prague - and another one of the Holy Family. Revving his car up, the young driver fondled the rosary which hung from the rearview mirror. During the trip, he will sign himself many times as he passes before a Church.

Since I have come to the Philippines, I am struck by these acts of devotion - popular and public. If you take a ferry - they are numerous linking the 7,000 isles of the archipelago – on leaving port a prayer is flashed on the large screens which are mounted on the various decks. Most of the passengers then make a sign of the cross: they entrust to the Lord the ones they have just left and those they will meet very shortly. And they also pray for a safe trip.

And if you enter into a church, you will see the faithful caressing tenderly the bleeding body of the Lord on the cross and to confide to him their prayers, applying their forehead on his gasping body. Even the generation of virtual encounters – the social network of the internet is used more in the Philippines than in France! –love to taste at great length and silently the presence of the Christ in the Blessed Sacrament for, for them, he is visible and tangible.

Here the faith must be expressed publicly, like at Lourdes or other places of pilgrimage. The Faith needs concrete gestures, tangible signs and at times is very sensual. The body is part of the active prayer of praise, of supplication or intercession. Faith is demonstrated everywhere, even on the large luminous advertising screens on the major arteries of the capital. "Jesus saves" they broadcast in all their loud colors. Faith belongs to all daily events. It finds expression in the supermarkets and in the banks even.

This astounds an Occidental or a Chinese, who live in societies where God does not seem to have his place in public, where all is permissible, where the mystery of God is not directly present to our conscience. I find here anew the importance of signs to take in, to taste God, to touch God present in me and around me in daily life. ..like the women who is ill in the Gospel and who succeeds in touching the fringe of Jesus' mantle , as St. Thomas who puts his hands in the scars in Jesus' body so as to find him in the poor, the small ones, the exploited that I meet every day.