

PRIEST SAYS

# 'Palaspas' have no magical powers

by DONA PAZZIBUGAN  
Inquirer.net



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**M**ANILA -- The palm leaves or *palaspas* that Catholics bring to Church on Palm Sunday do not get magical powers because they have been blessed by a priest, a Catholic Church official said recently.

Many Catholic Filipinos bring home the blessed palm fronds and place them on their altars or by the doorways and windows in the belief that they could bring luck or ward off evil spirits.

"Sometimes I could not help but smile because of the superstition. They put the *palaspas* by

the window or door to ward off evil. They don't realize that the evil spirits can't get out anymore because they're inside the house in the first place," Msgr. Pedro Qutorio said jokingly.

Qutorio, media director of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, said the palm leaves used during Palm Sunday Mass do not by themselves have any purpose other than as liturgical symbols.

Palm Sunday ushers in the Holy Week, the holiest period in the Catholic Church's calendar, when Christians commemorate the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that palms were laid on the road for Jesus Christ as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as the crowds triumphantly welcomed him as their new king.

The Bible says that even then Jesus Christ knew of his fate, that he would be sacrificed and crucified, but he still entered Jerusalem.

"The symbolism of the palaspas is that we welcome Christ to enter into the will of God. That is the meaning of the palm branches, not the superstitious part," Qutorio said.

"It is a liturgical symbol, a sacramental symbol that we use to show that we welcome Christ to enter into the will of God. We have to look at their deeper meaning in the liturgy," he added.

Qutorio said the Catholic Church is not totally against the beliefs attached to the blessed palm branches.

But he said it revealed the shortcomings of priests to teach the people and explain the deeper meanings of the Church's activities during the Holy Week.

Apart from warding off evil, some Catholics believe that burning a small piece of the *palaspas* at the height of a violent thunderstorm would calm down the heavens or at least protect the house from being hit by a lightning bolt.

"It's a challenge to the Church to catechize so the people would understand all the rites during the Holy Week," he said. ■

## Serenity...

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Good Friday, a public holiday in the Philippines, is commemorated with street processions, the Way of the Cross, Jesus' seven last words (*Siete Palabras*) and the *Senakulo*, or a passion play about the life and death of Jesus.

But what has been most famously observed and practiced in some communities, (especially in the province of Pampanga) are devotees who self-flagellate themselves, and sometimes even have themselves nailed to crosses as their expression of penance or fulfillment of their panata (a vow or promise accomplished in thanksgiving or in exchange for a granted request of prayer). Many foreigners have watched these practices in awe and shock, but more have admired the unwavering faith and devotion of the Filipinos.

Aside from abstinence from meat, noise is discouraged and bathing is proscribed after 3pm of Good Friday. This is the time at which Jesus is traditionally believed to have died, and the faithful are urged to keep a solemn and prayerful disposition through Black Saturday.

### Rejoice and resurrection

A joyous celebration opens Easter Sunday, the first being the *Salubong* at dawn, where the statues of Jesus and Mary, along with other saints such as St. Peter and Mary Magdalene are brought in procession. This is to reenact the first reunion of Jesus and his mother, Mary, after His resurrection.

But the most dramatic event is when an angel, usually played by a little girl, suspends in mid-air, sings the Regina Coeli and then dramatically pulls off the black veil off the statue of the Virgin Mary. This signifies the end of Mary's grieving and is followed by the pealing of bells, fireworks and a joyous Easter Mass.

Although not traditionally a Filipino practice, Easter egg hunts are held for children, but for most part, families hear Mass together, and share a special lunch or dinner.

The Holy Week is not simply a tradition that the Filipino culture has embedded on us by our forefathers. It is actually an act of serene faith—one that holds us together in true solidarity, wherever we may be. ■

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