

# Filipino American Youth and Culture

by Ed Tiong

## General Information

The Republic of the Philippines, located off the southeast coast of Asia, is one of the largest island groups in the world, numbering 7,107 islands. The 1995 population was approximately 60.5 million, with fifty-five percent of the people living on the largest island of Luzon. Approximately eighty-five percent of Filipinos are Catholic, with large numbers of Protestants and Muslims.

Filipinos comprise approximately 111 cultural and linguistic groups, mainly of Malayo-Polynesian origin. The ethnic make-up of the population has been greatly influenced by Chinese, Spanish, and Caucasian American intermarriages. Among the eleven language groups of the country, Filipino is the official national language which is native to the peoples of Central Luzon. The Philippines is, nevertheless, the third largest English-speaking country in the world.



During the sixteenth century, Spain conquered the islands which they named for King Phillip II as "Las Islas Filipinas" or the Philippine Islands. After 327 years of Spanish domination, the Filipinos revolted, and won their independence in 1898. However, after the Spanish-American War, the United States controlled the Philippines until 1942, when Japan seized control until they were liberated by the Americans. Finally, in 1946, the American Congress granted independence to the Filipinos, and the second Republic of the Philippines was born.

## Filipino Migration

Historians identify four major waves of Filipino migration to the United States. The first wave between 1898 and 1941 was comprised mostly of "pensionados" or scholars sent by the American government to U.S. schools, and large numbers of laborers recruited to work on farms in Hawaii and California. Filipino soldiers, who served in the U.S. armed forces and their families, came from 1945 until the early '60s. Professionals were encouraged to come in the 1960s and '70s during the boom years of the U.S. economy. The final wave came when U.S. immigration policies favored family reunification of those Filipinos already in the United States as immigrants or citizens. The 1990 U.S. Census Bureau reports that more than twenty-five percent of the foreign-born population claimed Asia as their birthplace, with the largest Asian group of Filipinos numbering 1.2 million persons. The states with the largest Filipino population are California, Hawaii, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, Washington, Virginia, Texas, Florida, and Maryland.

## Filipino Culture

Filipino culture is a mixture of Eastern and Western culture. The main influences are derived from three centuries of Spanish rule. These influences can be seen in their folk music, folk dance, language, food, art, and religion. Filipino food is a mixture of Asian and European dishes.

## **Filipino Family**

Family is central to the Filipino culture and society. In the Philippines, there are not many retirement homes or orphanages. Often in Filipino homes, it is not unusual to find grandparents or an extended relative living with their son or daughter's family.

The Filipino individual looks to the family for support, nurturing, and protection. This may include behaviors such as sharing of material things or buying things for a family member. Other Filipinos living in the United States with family or relatives back home will routinely send money called "remittances" and/or often send "Balikbayan" boxes of shipped household goods, clothes, canned foods and other items to the Philippines especially around Christmas Time.

The latest wave of migration to the United States and other countries has been teachers, non-professionals and other professionals, whereby young parents or individuals have left the Philippines to pursue employment opportunities or to receive more educational training. This sense of family obligation is an extension of the strong family ties and gratitude to their parents. This family loyalty is seen as "utang na loob," debt from within, which creates a culture bound in respect, obedience, and love.

For those Filipinos in the United States, there is a deep longing for home. Often, it is seen in local business of Filipino stores and/or restaurants catering to the taste and cuisine of their clientele with products imported from the Philippines from food, clothes, DVD Filipino movies and other items.

## **Filipino Catholics**

Filipino Catholics' experience of church is very different from that of most U.S. parishioners. Filipino parishes are very large, with little personal interaction between priest and people. Filipinos are not used to registering in a parish or contributing through Sunday envelopes. Also, according to the Commission on Education and Religious Instruction of the Filipino Bishops' Conference, "Filipino Catholicism has always ... [stressed] ...rites and ceremonies. Fiestas, processions, pilgrimages, novenas, innumerable devotional practices...mark the concrete devotional practice of Filipino Catholics. Much of what they know of Christian doctrinal truths and moral values is learned through these sacramental and devotional practices." (A Catholic Response to the Asian Presence, Washington, DC: NCEA, 1990)

Recently, however, Filipinos have begun to take an active role in American Church life. Their sheer numbers, their youth and vigor have forced parishes to recognize their presence. For example, in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Filipinos comprise approximately eighteen percent of the church-going population. As their religious heritage is more appreciated, they are encouraged to share their unique practices of popular piety such as, Simbang Gabi (pre-Christmas novena of Masses), Flores de Mayo (Marion devotion), Pagbasa ng Mahal na Pasyon (solemn readings of the passion,), devotions to the saints, novenas to the Nazareno, the feast of San Lorenzo Ruiz (the first Filipino martyr), etc. Today, many dioceses in the United States have offices that focus on Filipino ministries.

A survey conducted in 1995 indicates that there were approximately 300 Filipino priests, brothers, and deacons, and 200 sisters in the United States. Several priests were appointed pastors, many religious were appointed Catholic school principals, and many Filipinos have responsible positions in diocesan chanceries. Recently, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops through the Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees appointed a priest-delegate to act as liaison to Filipino priests and religious and as a point of contact with the Bishops of the Philippines.

Starting in 1990, Filipino Catholic leaders gathered at four large national "Sandiwa" Conferences to proclaim their identity and establish their place in the American Church. That special place is symbolized by the dedication of the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage of Antipolo at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. There she stands side by side with the religious symbols of the peoples of many other countries who have come to make this land the great nation that it is. After 100 years, it seems the Filipinos have finally arrived.

Regarding ministry with Filipinos in the United States, the survey cited above identified several directives to be pursued by pastoral ministers:

- Focus on Filipino youth who are doubly coping with being second generation Americans, and with the culture and religious devotions of their parents.
- Offer continuing religious education to Filipinos who came to this country as "cradle Catholics."
- Evangelize the native religious traditions which now sustain the faith of the first generation Filipinos.
- Focus on Filipino marriages, because spouses are coping with a liberal social environment and also with the pressures of financial stability.

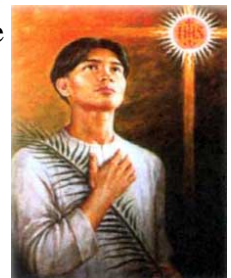
### **Filipino Feast Days**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of January - The Fiesta del Santo Niño de Cebu (Festival of the Child Jesus of Cebu)
- March or April "Holy Week" - Semana Santa
- May - Flores de Mayo celebrates in honor of the Virgin Mary
- June 12- Philippine Independence Day
- September 27 – Feast of San Lorenzo Ruiz (only Filipino Saint)
- Dec 16-24- Simbang Gabi (A novena of nine masses in Spiritual preparation for birth of Jesus Christ)

### **Filipino Saint & Blessed**

Saint Lorenzo Ruiz- He is the first Filipino saint. He was a married layperson of the Archdiocese of Manila; and a member of the Confraternity of the Rosary. He was martyred in 1637 and Pope John Paul II canonized him on October 18, 1987. His feast day is September 28<sup>th</sup>.

Blessed Pedro Calungsod- (seen on right) He was a young, layperson and catechist of the Archdiocese of Cebu. He was martyred in 1672 defending a Catholic priest. He is remembered on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. (<http://saints.sqpn.com/saintp86.htm>)



*Ed Tiong belongs to Corpus Christi Catholic Mission. He collaborated with the Office of Multicultural Ministries to help begin the Filipino ministry called "Paaralang Pinoy" which is a Filipino Cultural School in the Diocese of Arlington. He likes to help coach basketball. He has a wife and three school-age children.*



## Tips on Ministering to the Filipino American Population

1. Invite parents, family, young adults, and youth to an evening to recognize the contributions by the Filipino American community in the Catholic Church. There are many adult and youth volunteers who serve the church as catechists, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, music ministry, altar servers, prayer groups and other church positions.
2. Invite the Filipino American leaders and members of the community through social and civic organizations or prayer groups/Diocesan Ministry to fully participate in liturgy or joint projects. A good resource to use to reach out to Filipino Catholics is the Filipino Ministry of Northern Virginia. ([www.filipinoministry.catholicweb.com](http://www.filipinoministry.catholicweb.com) or the office of Cultural Diversity from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)
3. Most Filipino Americans do not have problems with speaking or understanding the English language. You may be able to reach out to parents and students by speaking at Religious Education classes with permission from the Director of Religious Education.
4. Organize programs that recognize Filipino culture, customs, tradition and language. Celebrate their annual Philippine Independence in the month of June or Filipino American Heritage Month in October. Better yet, why not attend a Filipino celebration or function and be immersed in the culture and community.
5. Invite young students, adults or parent volunteers to be part of the youth ministry program or CYO sports program. Most Filipino youth have an interest in basketball and often have organized Filipino basketball teams arranged by volunteers outside the school. Another popular sport among Filipinos is tennis. For more information contact 703-403-5624 Filipino American Tennis Organization of Northern Virginia or go to [www.filamtennis.com](http://www.filamtennis.com). This community tennis association works with the United States Tennis Association in promoting and developing the sport through participation in CYO or other local programs.
6. Attend or reach out to Filipino youth by immersing yourself in the culture. Filipino Ministry of Northern Virginia offers a program called “Paaralang Pinoy” which is a Filipino Cultural School geared to the young students to learn about culture and language. Their classes are held on Sundays from 2–4pm during the months between October and May and is usually held at St. Bernadette School in Springfield, VA. Please visit their website at [www.filamyouth.com](http://www.filamyouth.com)
7. Family ties run deep and are a central part of the fabric of Filipino American Society. There is great emphasis on respect, support and obedience within the structure of the family.
8. One of the most celebrated feast days in the Filipino Culture is Simbang Gabi which is a novena of nine Masses starting from Dec 16-Dec 24 or Dec 15-Dec 23, come and join

them on their celebrations at the liturgy and the reception after the Mass called “Salo-Salo”. Get to know their culture and the people.

9. Unlike the second and third generation Filipino Americans, first generation members the parents or family of the first generation maintain their ties of culture and values. With the varied influences of the current generation from consumerism, media, and liberal values, there needs to be more emphasis or assistance in creating an environment of faith and culture for them to be unswayed from the throngs of peer pressure leading to their confusion and identity as Filipino American Catholics. Parents who may be too busy with work and other things need to be more involved and take a stake in their children’s future. To minister to the parents may also be crucial in having the consistency needed to teach the Catholic values at home and church.

(Credit information from: <http://www.usccb.org/apa/filipino.shtml>)