

Semana Santa & Triduum – Holy Week Celebrations

by Densy Chandra & Fr. Edmundus Sonny de Class, SVD

An island in the Eastern part of Indonesia has contributed the most number of Catholic missionaries throughout the world. At one time, it had the largest number of seminarians in the world. The Indonesian Divine Word Missionaries come mostly from the Island of Flores (Flower Island). There are a significant number of Indonesian Divine Word Missionaries from Flores who work in the U.S. Catholic Church. They include pastors and also in leadership role such as a Provincial for one of the U.S. provinces.

Flores has unique and one of a kind of Holy Week tradition in Indonesia. I share this five-century old tradition by collaborating with Father Edmundus Sonny de Class, SVD, a formator at the Divine Word Seminary in Epworth, Iowa. Indonesia is the world most populous Muslim country and Catholics comprise only 3% of the population. Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic nation comprised of 17,508 islands. There are many cultures and traditions throughout the nation's islands.

Semana Santa (Holy Week) celebration in Larantuka, East Flores, Indonesia.

Every year during Holy Week many devoted Catholics in the surrounding area commemorate the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The Holy Week celebration reaches climatic point on the Good Friday evening procession. The faithful recall the suffering of

Jesus accompanied by His Mother Mary on the way of the cross to Golgotha.



Statue of Tuan Ma, Sorrowful Mother

Those participating in the Good Friday procession carry the two main statues: Tuan Ana (God the Son, Jesus), and Tuan Ma (the Sorrowful Mother). This tradition began about 500 years ago when the Portuguese missionaries came to Flores Island, the Eastern part of Indonesia. They brought along with them Catholic images and statues. One of them is known as Tuan Ma, which means Tuan Mother, referring to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The statue of the Sorrowful Mother is kept in the *Kapela Tuan Ma*, the Chapel of the Mother.

No one knows for sure how this statue of Mary came to Larantuka. There is a legend that the statue was found on the sea shore by a man named John Resiona. He brought the statue and put it in the house of the clan. Many years

later, Portuguese missionaries came to Larantuka, and found the statue of Mary. They taught the Catholic faith to the people, then these locals began to accept the Catholic faith. The missionaries also introduced the procession of the statue of Tuan Ma, and built the Chapel of Tuan Ma.



Chapel of Tuan Ma, where the Statue of Tuan Ma is kept

The faithful in Larantuka renew their faith and commitment to the Lord by following Him closely in the Good Friday procession. They believe that God's grace and blessings flow out during the prayers and meditation.

The faithful praying in the Chapel of Tuan Ana

During the *Semana Santa* or the Holy Week, especially on Holy Thursday and Good Friday morning, people come to the chapel to show their respect to Mother Mary. In the meantime, they also prepare the route for the procession by placing candles along the route. In the afternoon, both statues of Mary and Jesus are taken to the Cathedral for the procession in the evening.

The procession begins with the prayer around 6 pm led by a bishop in the Cathedral. The faithful walk in procession and carry the statues of Mary and Jesus around the town. They pass by eight stations. At every station, they read the Gospel, pray and sing *O Vos Omnes*. People come to Larantuka from other islands as well as from the foreign land to participate in the *Semana Santa*.





*The statue of Tuan Ma being carried to the
Cathedral during the Good Friday Procession*





Celebrants and faithful during the procession. From left to right: Fr. Fransiskus da Santo, Fr. Paulus Wolor, Fr. Sonny de Class, SVD



Right: Tuan Ana, laid in a casket being carried during procession.



Left: A prayer leader sings O Vos Omnes at one of the stations

Semana Santa is a popular devotion in which the faithful express their faith in God through prayer and action. According to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy:

Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See.

Devotions proper to individual Churches also have a special dignity if they are undertaken by mandate of the bishops according to customs or books lawfully approved.

But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, in accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them. (SC, 13).

Many Indonesian Catholics in the U.S. have not experienced the *Semana Santa* tradition practiced in Flores Island. However, the Indonesian Catholic Communities (ICCs) in the U.S. celebrate the Triduum with the local church. ICCs that are able to celebrate Easter with Indonesian priests usually have a community gathering after that includes a food bazaar. It is an opportunity to partake of Indonesian food, socialize with friends who may not regularly attend the Mass in Indonesian, and fundraise for various charitable projects. There are about twenty ICCs, but there are only three Indonesian chaplains who minister to them. Through the kindness of Indonesian student priests, as well as other Indonesian priests, the ICC's have priests who give their time to minister to them. ICCs have contributed resources to support four Indonesian priests in the U.S., and for support of six men who are currently in formation. We pray for vocations among the Indonesian Catholics in the U.S.