

My dear Little Flower,

Moments of silence are moments of God, powerful moments of peace. Today, we light the 4th candle of our Advent Wreath: the candle of peace. Today, we also bless our Creche (our manger scene) at all Masses.

We are doing well with our Advent Prayer Adventure! As young families continuously come in through the doors of our little parish, *our community family* would like to welcome them. I am pleased when I read and pray with your prayers placed at our Manger of Dreams and Hopes; this week, we will be giving out *little doves*, as we journey through the Advent **Week of Peace**, for you to bring home as a symbol of our prayers as one big family.

The Women's and Men's Ministry held their Christmas gathering; both turned out well. We would like to thank Pam Loblely for speaking at the Women's gathering, and Mario Costabile (Founding Member and Executive Director of *Array of Hope*) for speaking at the Men's gathering. We appreciate their ministry and their Christian witness this Advent Season.

As I continue to brainstorm ideas on how to *enhance* our Multi-Purpose Room and Youth Room at the Parish Center, a few parishioners have been so generous as to donate the blinds of the rooms. Thank you so much - it was a very "homey" addition! I am blessed to have so many generous and faithful parishioners that make things happen for Little Flower.

This week, I'd like to introduce you to the "*parol*" (from the Spanish word *farol*, which means "lantern"). The *parol*, a uniquely Filipino Christmas decoration, is a typically star-shaped Christmas lantern that lights the streets and houses of the Philippines around the Yuletide season. The use of the *parol* is significant to Filipinos with regards to the theme of "pilgrimage". The town folks light up the path with these hanging star-lanterns that lead the people to their local churches for *Misa de Gallo*, the "Dawn Mass", the traditional nine-day novena (at 4:30AM) that starts on December 16 which culminates on Christmas Eve.

For us Filipinos, this Spanish-influenced, star-shaped lantern signifies *Christ's victory of light over darkness*, presently reminding us of hope amidst despair. It encourages the Filipino people to remain resilient in our pilgrimage of life, while placing our faith only in God.

Traditionally, the *parol* is made from bamboo sticks and *papel de japon* (Japanese paper); today, these lanterns are lit with light bulbs or LEDs which give joy to those who see them. An authentic Filipino material that is used today is the *capiz*; the "*capiz*" are made out of shells indigenous to the Philippine shores.

I am so happy to announce that this version of the *parol* we have hung above the facade of our parish church this 4th Week of Advent - up there with our traditional - magnificent - Christmas wreath! It gives me joy and peace to see hung a *shining star upon the highest bough* - it personally means a lot to me, this co-mingling of different cultures and traditions. This is *incarnational theology* at its finest - two different symbols from different cultures and traditions, coming together harmoniously, in expectation of the ADVENT of the Lord.

This gives me joy. This gives me peace.

Your parish priest,
Fr JC Merino