**What is a “Santacruzan”?**

“Santacruzan” is a religious-historical pageant held in the Philippines during the month of May. It depicts the finding of the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by Queen Helena, the mother of the very powerful Emperor, Constantine the Great who ended the persecution of Christians.

Constantine, the emperor of Rome some hundreds of years ago, had a dream in which he was asked to go to the battle field to fight in the name of the Holy Cross. He conquered his enemy and that victory led to his conversion into a Christian. He became the first Christian emperor in history. His mother Reyna Helena, was inspired by all these experiences and in the year 326 A.D., she went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to seek the Holy Cross, the wooden cross on which Christ was supposed to have been nailed. She successfully found the Holy Cross, complete with its inscription ‘INRI’ on its top.

The festivity commemorates the search of the Holy Cross by Empress Helena and her son, the newly converted emperor. After finding the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, it was authenticated by a miracle of healing attributed to it, and was brought back to Rome. The search was marked with a joyful celebration of thanksgiving.

The religious procession is a re-enactment of the finding of the Holy Cross by Reyna Helena.

**What is the “Flores de Mayo”?**

This is a religious festival in honor of Mary, the Mother of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Feast is marked with the offering of flowers by sagalas or shepherd girls. The “Mayflower” offering may refer to the whole flower festival celebrated in the month of May in honor of Virgin Mary.

During the festival in May, flowers are offered to the Virgin Mary at the altar in the church. Every afternoon, young girls dressed in white, visit the church with cut flowers or baskets of petals in their hands. While walking to the altar, they either sprinkle the petals in honour of Mama Mary or offer bouquets of flowers. The Santacruzan procession is always the final part and the highlight of the festival of Flores de Mayo. The procession is a pageant held in many cities and even in small villages.

Instead of icons or images, beautiful women with elegant or theatrical costumes, portray biblical and historical characters. The persons in the parade called, Sagalas, symbolize queens from the past and are dressed beautifully to emulate “real” queens.

This custom and celebration started after the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. Introduced by the Spanish conquerors, this religious tradition is more than 100 years old and lives even more in Europe and America. The tradition is religiously celebrated preceded by the nine days of prayer, a novena, in honor of the Holy Cross and coupled with the Flores de Mayo.
The history of our faith is represented by:

1. **Reina Banderada** – She carries a yellow triangular flag; she represents the coming of Christianity to the Philippines when the Spaniards landed in Homonhon in the Visayan Island.

2. **Reina Mora** – She represents the dominant religion of those times, before Christianity was introduced. Mora is the feminine of Moro from the Muslim religion mainly found in the island of Mindanao.

**The Aetas** – the group represents the state of the Filipino native tribes, before the coming of Christianity. They represent the unconverted Filipino pagans found in the mountains of Luzon.

3. **Reina Judith** – It is recorded that Judith of Pethulia was a very beautiful, intelligent and courageous woman who loved God and her people. She used her impeccable beauty to behead the cruel General Holofernes, to save a nation. She carries a head (in a transparent sack) and a sword.

4. **Reina Sheba** – The Queen of Sheba is said to be a very beautiful, wealthy and wise Queen. She traveled far to meet King Solomon. She brought him spices, gold and precious stones to test his wisdom. Because she was in awe of Solomon’s wisdom, she pronounced a blessing on Solomon’s God and in return, he gave her everything her heart desired. She carries a jewelry box.

5. **Reina Esther** – The name ‘Esther’ means star. Because of her beauty, she was chosen to be Queen. When an order to kill all Jews was decreed by one of King Xerxes’s men named Haman. Queen Esther prayed to God before revealing to the King, that she was a Jew. She told the King that she would have to die, since she was one of them. So the King stopped the execution and because of Esther, a nation was saved. She carries a scepter.

We honor six extraordinary and memorable women from the NEW TESTAMENT:

6. **The Samaritan Woman** – The woman at the well was surprised that Jesus spoke to her, because Jews and Samaritans did not have anything to do with each other. Jesus offered her Living Water and the woman came to know God. From there, she inspired the people of Samaria to see and hear Jesus for their selves. It is the longest recorded conversation of Jesus with another person in the Bible. She carries a jug on her shoulder.

7. **Veronica** – Saint Veronica was the woman moved by pity. She wiped the face of Jesus with a cloth as He carried his Cross to Golgotha. Jesus accepted the offering and once his face was wiped, his image was miraculously imprinted on it. She carries a scarf with the face of Jesus.

**The Tres Marias** – They represent the women who visited the tomb of Jesus on the day of Resurrection – only to find that the tomb was empty.

8. **Mary of Magdala** – carries a bottle of perfume
9. Mary, Joanna – carries a handkerchief

10. Mary, the Mother of James – carries a bottle of oil

We also honor the many titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

11. Divina Pastora (Mother Mary - The Divine Shepherdess) – Mary, as the mother, is the Shepherdess and guardian of the Divine Shepherd; our Lord, Jesus Christ. She carries a shepherdess staff.

12. Reina de las Estrellas (Mother Mary - Queen of the Stars) – Mary, who is blessed among all women, holds a special place among the stars. She carries a wand with a star.

13. Rosa Mystica (Mary, The Mystical Rose) – Mary, the most beautiful of God's creation, is indeed "the Incarnate Rose," especially chosen for God’s garden. She is the "rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys" [Song 2:1]. There is no rose comparable to her and she has made Paradise ever so much more beautiful. She carries a bouquet of roses.

14. Reina Paz (Mother Mary - Queen of Peace) – Mother Mary, the lover of Peace, implores us to keep our eyes and our focus on God, in order for the world to have Peace. She carries the symbol of peace (a dove).

15. Reina de las Profetas (Mother Mary - Queen of Prophets) - For many Catholics, calling Mary “queen of prophets” is a reminder that the prophets of the Old Testament looked ahead to the Mother of the Messiah as well as the Messiah himself. However, our Lady was herself also regarded as a prophet. That she is a prophet is part of the Gospel portrait of the Virgin Mother of Jesus. She carries an hourglass.

16. Reina del Cielo (Mother Mary - Queen of Heaven) – The Catholic teaching on this subject is expressed in the papal encyclical Ad Caeli Reginam,[1] issued by Pope Pius XII. It states Mary is called the Queen of Heaven because her Son, Jesus Christ, is the King of Israel and heavenly King of the Universe. In the Hebrew tradition, the mother of the king is the queen. She carries a flower.

17. Reina de las Virgines (Mother Mary - Queen of Virgins) – The personification of Mother Mary which inspires, symbolizes and honors all the young and unwed women of the world. She carries a rosary and is surrounded by angels.

18. Reina de las Flores (Mother Mary - Queen of Flowers) – The Blessed Mother is honored and crowned with beautiful blossoming flowers each year, during the month of May; earning her the title “Queen of Flowers”. She carries a bouquet of flowers.
19. Reina Abogada (Mother Mary, Defender of the Poor) – Reyna Abogada is the personification of Mary known to be the protector of the poor, the oppressed and the downtrodden. She is always ready to defend and protect those in need. She wears a black graduation cap (toga) and gown and she carries a big book.

20. Reina Justicia - (Mother Mary - Queen of Justice) – The personification of the Blessed Mother as the: “Mirror of Justice.” We need not ask why she is called a mirror. For we know that it was God in His glorious perfections, that is Jesus, who was reflected in Mary. She carries a weighing scale and a sword.

21. Reina de la Esperanza (Mother Mary – Queen of Hope) – She symbolizes the theological virtue of Hope.. She carries an anchor.

22. Reina de la Fe (Mother Mary – Queen of Faith) – She symbolizes the theological virtue of Faith. She carries a cross.

23. Reina de la Caridad (Mother Mary – Queen of Charity) – She symbolizes the theological virtue of Charity. She carries a red heart.

24. Reyna Elena – Emperatriz (Empress Helena of the True Cross) – She is the legendary founder of the True Cross. She carries a cross.

**Empress Helena of the True Cross** was the legendary founder of the True Cross. Despite her advanced age, she traveled to the Holy Land in search of the cross that Jesus was crucified on. She found three crosses and proved which cross was true, by having a woman who was already at the point of death, brought from Jerusalem. When the woman touched the first and second crosses, her condition did not change, but when she touched the third and final cross she suddenly recovered. Helena declared the cross with which the woman had been touched to be the True Cross and brought it back to Rome. The true cross is represented by the small cross she carries. She is escorted by Emperor Constantine.