FAST FACTS: What you should know about Our Lady of La Naval

For devotees, Our Lady of La Naval is the symbol of love and strength to withstand life’s constant battles

Glenda Marie Castro Published October 13, 2019

MANILA, Philippines — For most Catholics, the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is an epitome of expressing their faith.

Every second Sunday of October, thousands of devotees join the procession celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Holy Rosary - La Naval at Santo Domingo Church in Quezon City.

As the devotees gather, whispers of prayers are lifted to heaven in exchange for receiving miracles from La Naval.
Miracle in battles

It was also miracles in battles centuries ago that gave birth to the annual grand celebration of La Naval in the Philippines.

In 1646, the Dutch Republic attempted to invade the Philippines as part of its strategy to open trade in South Asia. The Spanish and Filipino defenders had only two old galleons against the enormous Dutch ships.

The book, *The Saga of La Naval: Triumph of a People's Faith*, recounts the story of a naval captain who asked Our Lady of the Holy Rosary for their victory. He vowed that if their prayers were granted, they will walk barefoot towards her shrine in Santo Domingo Church in Intramuros, Manila.

Then the miracles happened: the defenders conquered the naval battles five times in 1646. The successes were attributed to the intercession of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. Hence, she was venerated with the title "La Naval".

In October that same year, the first Feast of La Naval de Manila was celebrated in the old Santo Domingo Church first built by the Dominicans in Intramuros in January 1588.

Unfortunately, it was struck by fire in 1603; two earthquakes in 1645 and 1863; and the Japanese bombing in 1941.

The old church found a new home on Quezon Avenue in Quezon City in 1952. Two years later, the Philippine Catholic Church hierarchy declared Sto. Domingo Church the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary.

Our Lady of the Holy Rosary was canonically crowned on October 5, 1907. This was one of the most significant events during the first decade of the 20th century in the country.

Beautiful vestments

The La Naval used in the procession today is not its first sculptured image. The original image—made of wood—was burned during World War II. It was brought to the country by Dominicans from Acapulco, Mexico in 1587.

In 1593, a non-Catholic Chinese artist was commissioned to carve the head and hands of La Naval and the Holy Child. The 400-year old image was made of ivory, earning the distinction of being the oldest Marian ivory sculpture in the country.

*Rappler* recently visited the Santo Domingo Church's first exhibit for the feast of La Naval, launched this year. We saw some of the preserved pre-war and decade-long mantels that have great historical value. Among these are the *Numero Uno* and *Carrascoro Ensemble*.

The oldest vestment of La Naval was Numero Uno. It was one of the artifacts saved from the ravages of World War II. La Naval wore this iconic vestment during her canonical coronation in Intramuros in 1907.
It is carefully embroidered with gold threads that make La Naval look so regal. The gilded bodice, skirt, and sleeves are mounted on the silver backing of the *plancha*, which La Naval wears along with Numero Uno. A young missionary we met at the exhibit told us the silver hem of the *plancha* was said to be dipped in gold, making it sparkle from afar.

PRESERVED. La Naval wore Gala Mantle called Numero Uno together with the Plancha for its Canonical Coronation in Intramuros in 1907. Photo by Glenda Marie Castro/Rappler

Don Antonio Carrascoso, a devotee from Spain, donated a new gala out of gratitude and thanksgiving to Our Lady. La Naval wore this when Pope Paul VI visited the country in 1970. During the historic visit, the Pope declared Our Lady as the Patroness of Quezon City.

GIFT OF GRATITUDE. Don Antonio Carrascoro of Spain designed the Carrascoro Ensemble in 1960 after the patterns of Numero Uno. Photo by Glenda Marie Castro/Rappler
The vestment of La Naval was inspired by the Spanish court dress in the late 16th century. The camarera, or the handmaids, were in charge of the process in clothing La Naval. The first camarera was Doña Angelita Leyba.

Aside from her mantels, her pieces of jewelry and crown also spark interest. A written account by a priest in 1907 said the La Naval's crown weighed 60 ounces, or equivalent to 1,866 grams. There were 1,083 gemstones set into it, including 62 sapphires, 61 rubies, and 59 rubies. The crown was valued at P30,850.00.

On the other hand, the Infant Jesus’ crown weighed 21 ounces and was, at that time, worth P10,600. This crown has 638 gemstones consisting of sapphires, emeralds, rubies, topazes, among others.

**Marian processions**

The celebration of Our Lady of La Naval is not only a commemoration of a historical conquest, but it also reveals the meaning of one of the most important Marian processions in the country. (READ: WATCH: Mass, grand procession for La Naval de Manila 2018)

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