

Day of the Dead: A Filipino Catholic Tradition

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photo by dancingfishes, on Flickr

Day of Saints and the Dead, a Filipino Catholic Tradition

In the Philippines, days before All Saints Day and All Souls Day, people go to cemeteries for their annual "grass-clearing". They, or they have someone, *tabas* (tuh'bus) or cut away overgrown grasses around their dead relatives' tombs. This, I believe, is the tradition. Come the weeks close to November 1st and 2nd, Catholic Filipinos prepare themselves to go back to cemeteries for a visit. We call this *Araw ng Patay* (ah'rou nung putt-tie') or Day of the Dead. It is actually on the 2nd - All Souls' Day - the day for all our faithful departed. But most people go visit as early as when the holiday starts at the first day of November. Yes, it is religious. The dominantly Catholic country, strongly believing in life after death, knows that prayers will help the souls in purgatory reach eternal life in heaven.



Flowers, candles and silent prayers?

It is not really as boring as you may think.

Our *Araw ng Patay* can be colorful - like Poland as pictured above - and sometimes loud, too...

No Real Halloween Fun But A Busy Merry-Making Event

In the morning, it feels like springtime in 4-season countries. The supposedly Halloween time becomes like the second bloom of the year. Buckets of flowers are everywhere for sale. Store fronts become a colorful garden to attract Catholic buyers. Candles, plain or decorated, also become hot items. I've always wanted to get the fancy ones but we always opted for the cheap whites made of wax.

I don't remember myself actually praying by tombstones. I might have whispered to my oldest brother (who died about a week after birth) but not prayed. As far as I know, the days of the dead continue to be more of a merry-making occasion rather than solemn moments. Old tradition becomes modern, so to speak. We, however, never really did or do on our end. But on other graveyards, people are all out. They bring tents, mats, chairs and picnic goodies as if it is a big family reunion. Well, sort of, it is . . . only that there are dead relatives being involved.



With a basket of flowers and candles, instead of pumpkins and a bag of candies, we're off to celebrate or commemorate our dead.

It is indeed a busy affair for Catholic Filipinos in the Philippines. I guess we don't need Halloween ghouls and ghosts to scare us 'cause traffic is already a nightmare. Especially at night, All Saints' Day or All Souls' Day becomes as packed as rush hours - times two. I say that because back home we drive through bottle necks. No big-city freeways. Imagine yourself cramming into 2-way roads where some undisciplined motorists will honk unnecessarily or drive on the curbside. For cryin' out loud! This is why we never went on the actual day or night. I think, as far as I remember, we paid our visits either October 31st or November 3rd.

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