



Guidelines on the Celebration of SIMBANG GABI In the Archdiocese of Manila

1. *Simbang Gabi* is a typical Filipino way of preparing for the great feast of Christmas. The tradition was brought to us by Spanish evangelizers from Mexico. Originally, it popularly came to be known as *Misa Aguinaldo*. *De Aguinaldo* means gift, gift, which is peculiar to Christmas. That is why, the faithful wake up early morning for nine days before Christmas to join in the celebration of the dawn Mass. The faithful make this their “*Aguinaldo*” to God for the great gift of Jesus. The practice can also be understood as the preparation of the faithful to receive from God the great gift or “*Aguinaldo*” of Christmas, which is Jesus, the Savior of the world.
But for Filipino Catholics, *Simbang Gabi* is above all an expression of their filial devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. For nine consecutive days, they join and accompany her, so to speak, as she awaits the birth of her Son. For this reason, the Masses on these days are celebrated as solemn votive Masses in her honor.
2. Throughout the centuries, the celebration of *Simbang Gabi* or *Misa de Aguinaldo* has been preserved, enriched and sustained by our people in spite of the pastoral and liturgical challenges it underwent. Its form of celebration today is the effect of the long history of this celebration. It was at the First Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1953 that a formal petition to Rome was made *Simbang Gabi*. The Papal Indult with these conditions: “*On the nine days preceding the Nativity of our Lord, i.e., from December 16 to 24, the solemn votive Mass Rorate Coeli Desuper is sung especially in parish and convent churches, but only once a day with great solemnity and with a big attendance of the faithful.*” (*Acta et Decreta Primi Concilii Plenarii Ins. Phil*, 1953, n. 356: J. Ylla, OP, *Indultos y Privilegios de Filipinas*, UST Press, 1940, p. 24.)
3. On March 24, 1961, Rome granted the continuation of this Indult for five years. (Cf. A. Santamaria, “*Misas de Aguinaldo*” in *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas* (April, 1961), pp. 470-471) Today, everywhere in the Philippines, the *Simbang Gabi* is celebrated with great solemnity, with the singing of the “*Gloria*”, in white vestments, and with Christmas carols and festive ornamentations, in contrast with the sober character of the Advent season.
4. The imposition of Martial Law contributed to the modification of the time of the *Simbang Gabi* in some places. The adjustment from dawn to evening was in view of the curfew hours imposed during the Martial Law regime. Today, this practice continues to be kept even if the curfew hour restriction is no longer in force. Many of our faithful who follow the urban rhythm of work find it easier to join in the evening instead of the dawn Masses. This adjusted time allows them to continue receiving spiritual nourishment and appreciation of the Christian meaning of Christmas amidst its secularized celebration
5. We wish to encourage the practice of *Simbang Gabi*, whether at dawn or in the evening, because it is a great source of spiritual nourishment to our faithful. In this connection, we present to you, our dear Pastors and collaborators in the pastoral care of our Christian communities, guidelines that will help us to observe faithfully the Indult given to us and keep from abuses and misinterpretation this venerable Filipino tradition.

6. From the beginning the *Simbang Gabi* has always been celebrated at an early hour, **from 4 to 5 o'clock in the morning**. It is this Mass alone that is considered *Simbang Gabi* or *Misa de Aguinaldo*. Other Masses celebrated during the nine days before Christmas are celebrated as Masses of the Advent season, and should follow the norms of the liturgy of the Advent season. If the *Misa de Aguinaldo* is celebration from **8:00 o'clock in the evening onwards**, it should be motivated by genuine pastoral care for the spiritual benefit of the faithful. The celebration of the *Misa de Aguinaldo* at other times, , e.g., morning, mid-day or late afternoon Mass, is not in keeping with the liturgical norms of the Archdiocese of Manila and is to be regarded as an abuse. Therefore, only the dawn and, when pastorally required, the evening Masses are considered *Simbang Gabi* or *Misa de Aguinaldo*.
7. When *Simbang Gabi* is celebrated in the evening of Saturday and Sunday, one should take the liturgy of the Sunday. It should be noted that Sunday evening Mass should not anticipate the weekday Mass of the following day. White vestments are used, the *Gloria* is sung, and musical instruments accompany the singing during the *Simbang Gabi* of Saturday evening, dawn of Sunday and Sunday evening.
For the Mass formulary of the weekday *Simbang Gabi*, the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Advent (*Rorate Coeli desuper*), should be used with Gloria, Advent Preface II, white vestment. The *Supplement to the Roman Sacramentary* gives us the Mass texts, for the prayers and the readings. The CBCP has approved that the readings for the December 16 *Simbang Gabi* are from the Friday of the Third Week of Advent: *Is 56:1-3,6-8* and *John 5:33-36*.
8. The ordinary place for the celebration of the *Simbang Gabi* Masses is the parochial church. Chapels, which are duly recognized within the jurisdiction of the parish church, are given permission to celebrate *Simbang Gabi* only with the consent of the parish priest and in coordination with the parish. *Simbang Gabi* may not be celebrate in malls or shopping centers, unless there is a chapel in the establishment, where the Holy Eucharist is celebrated with frequency and duly approved by us. We do not allow *Simbang Gabi* to be celebrated in corridors and hallways of shopping malls where the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is needlessly exposed to shoppers that are indifferent to the celebration.
9. As we prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ through the unique Filipino Catholic tradition of *Simbang Gabi*, may the faith and devotion of Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the Filipino nation, inspire us to receive in our hearts and home God's surpassing Aguinaldo in the person of Jesus Christ. Let us keep her company through prayer and good works, so that she may also keep us company as we journey toward the fulfillment of God's promise of peace in our nation and in the world.

Arzobispado de Manila, 15 November 2010.

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