

## THE GREAT FLOOD OF INFANTA

From the local resident's point of view, the calamity that significantly changed the long time geographical nature of Infanta, Gen. Nakar and Real towns in Quezon province is considered the biggest in recent history. It can also be referred to as a tsunami in reverse, i.e. coming from the mountains down to the ocean.

The visible and physical causes of the devastation, although incomparable with what was described in the bible as "bursting the abyss" of the mountains or opening the "floodgates of the sky" during the first Great Flood, has nevertheless, its own agonizing consequences. The aftermath struck the spirit and lives of its victims and area residents.

From either a remote or close view of the eastern side of Sierra Madre, one will simply see hundreds of mountain bruises with varying sizes, shapes and also imagine the magnitudes of solid and liquid contents when they eroded. Every piece of the mountain chip contributed to the vast accumulation of heavy mixtures that found their way mostly through ledges, creeks and rivers along the sides facing the Pacific. Compounding its contents are tons of stumps, uprooted trees, logs, wild creatures, vegetation and in some areas even boulders and rocks. With the three towns of Infanta, Gen. Nakar and Real located a few kilometers away from its foot, the concentrated mountain debris charged their rampage through the area, finding their ultimate destination on the beaches and depths of the Pacific Ocean. From the early evening hours through midnight on November 29, 2004, hundreds of residents perished, properties destroyed, and the new face of the region was transformed. Among the early casualty was Fr. Cha Colendres, secretary of the Prelature's Bishop Rolando Tria Tirona, who was rescuing distressed residents in one of the barangay.

The avalanche caught the whole region helplessly awed and shocked. They have never imagine that such colossal havoc from nature can happen, more so for its long lasting impact on their environment and

livelihood. While outside watchers mobilized available resources for relief, the area remained isolated for days except the fainting signal of a surviving cellphone company, the only fastest link to the outside world. Except through the stormy ocean towards the far southern town of Mauban, the provincial road was blocked with continuous series of erosion from the nearby mountain side.

The catastrophic aftermath of the calamity became well-known, generating both national and international concern and assistance. They include government, religious, corporate, private, non-profit organizations and relief agencies from the Red Cross as well as the United Nations. The Our Lady of Fatima Rosary Prayer Group of Lansing was no exception to one of these organizations. Through the Sagip Buhay, a grass root action group of Infanta Community Development Adm. Inc. (I.C.D.A.I.) and directed by Fr. Francis Lucas of the Infanta Prelature, their financial assistance was timely received during the early relief operations. Through one of its director Mr. Efren Catalla, boxes of assorted relief goods also came all the way from the Quezon Foundation of Illinois. The people of Infanta are undoubtedly grateful for all these generous acts.

With renewed hope and courage to face another future, the people are now going through the phase of rehabilitation. Their unbending spirit remain resilient with the changing challenges. Not to be forgotten are those whose lives have been distorted by the loss of their children and families as well as those who lost everything. Some orphans were just left with either their own unforgettable experience of survival, saving other peoples' lives, miraculous incidents they encounter or other sorts of stories about 11/29. With outside help and assistance, they are rebuilding another future of their town.

With these realities, the question was raised of why incident of this magnitude happens? Just like when other catastrophic incidents in our lives occur, we ask why we need to suffer. More often though, we find our question remaining as a puzzle. With His wisdom impenetrable as the blinding glare of the sun, our sight sometimes cannot even catch a clue for its solution. And so we go on with our lives, wondering and hoping that someday the shattered pieces will be in their proper place to

reveal the puzzle.

The real answer to the question lies somewhere, hoping that sometimes His way will be revealed. It may take a lot of patience and perseverance before we find the glaring truth and answer. With constant prayer to nourish our faith, we strive to be drawn closer to His way. As we have been forewarned, we should not stay afar from the water so that we remain refreshed. This is faith and it needs to be unceasingly nurtured so that we don't snap from the vine which is the way, truth, and life.

We also go through suffering because it seems to be a component of the consequence of our shortcomings. Only miracle can intervene during the occurrence of natural phenomena. It is improper to ask for miracle for it is equivalent to the sinful act of putting our Lord to a test. Miracle is grace or a gift and as such is freely given without condition, otherwise, it ceases to be grace. When we know that a grave disaster will occur, we can pray, beg or plead for an intervention, then miracle may or may not intervene. Because grace seems to be just a particle of something big, pure and holy, anything opposite its nature are probably repulsed. It is like goodness rejecting bad(ness). So by their very nature, the two cannot complement each other to come up with a solution. Asking a miracle to prevent the consequence of going against His wish is immediately impossible unless and only unless .....the miraculous (merciful) nature of Him prevails.

A superficial answer to the question of why things happen can also be considered, in this case, there was flood because there was not enough holding power for the water to stay where it fell. The soil got so soaked from constant rain and boom, the law of nature takes over. Why was there low holding power? Because there were no roots around to clinch the soil. No roots because for too many years, too many trees have been toppled down by loggers.

The law of nature was not legislated. Rather, they are based on physical truth and reason, and during the course of human experience was adopted unarbitrarily to be the rule of conduct. Man therefor, acting rationally, found it destructive to alter our natural environment. If

therefor we will listen to our "still, small voice" within us, we will hear for a reason that God's law also lies in the law of nature. No matter how faint, this voice resonate to everyone, from the logging capitalist in the executive suite to the tribal "aetas" in the bosom of the mountain as well as among us who reside in between, this voice should be made audible to all for everybody's survival.

Now that we are led to this point, do we still need a superior being to rationalize the great flood? Is it not enough to acknowledge that we encroached upon the law of nature and therefor deserve its consequences if we don't take care of the environment? From the moment of creation, everything was put in its natural order. Then came man, created in his image who was, on the sixth day was given dominion over the sea, air, moving creatures and all the living plants on earth. Dominion over all creation, yes it is still going on. Much has been provided, much has been reaped and unsurprisingly, man is falling short of his responsibility in the bargain. With human frailties we caused disorder but with our strength, faith and love, hope are still bountiful to strive caring of His creation.

In the meantime, the renewed geophysical face of Infanta region will remain there for a considerable time. In seemingly inexhaustible quantities, the flood hauled all kinds of trees, logs and stumps and left them burried in towns, farms, and beaches. As if teasing the residents, nature shove the harvest of human greed even to the innermost niche of their living room. And possibly to enrich the agricultural soil, a few feet of mountain soil were spread all over to heighten the layer of the land in farms, meadows and plantations. For years to come, people may not have to patronize contained fuel from big oil companies and thus minimize pollution. Firewood abound everywhere. Organic nutrients for plants, vegetables and crops are already mixed in the soil thus minimizing chemicals in the harvest. And of course lumber, landowners may just have to saw delivered logs in their own backyard. Civil authorities only allow local consumption and forbid shipment beyond municipal boundaries.

With all these conveniently provided new resources in the lowlands, there are no more reason even to ponder the need of exploiting the

height of Sierra Madre. Instead, it should be left alone and be content in admiring its blue remaining beauty that stretch several provinces on its opposite side. A towering and magnificent creation that overlooks three towns, the renewed face of the flattened lands and the big Pacific Ocean. As if a monumental reminder of past misdeeds, may the residents be the first vigilantes against anybody who will again come to town and attempt to abuse the grandeur and bounty of Sierra Madre. May the Virgin Mother Mary, their patroness, help REINA, (Real, Infanta & Gen. Nakar) become a true spirited "Sambayan ng mga Dukha" in their heart.

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