

Mary Mediatrix of all Grace in Digos



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FOR those of you who do not know it yet, Digos is the capital of the province of Davao del Sur.

Three Mary Mediatrix Churches

On August 22, 2008 feast of the Queenship of Mary, the cathedral parish in Digos celebrates its 57th Patronal Fiesta of Mary Mediatrix of all Grace. This does not seem to be extraordinary until one realizes that in the entire Philippines today, based on the Philippine Catholic Directory, there are only three churches under the patronage of Mary Mediatrix. All of them are in the island of Mindanao, namely, the Cathedral in Kidapawan founded in 1950, North Cotabato, the Cathedral in Digos, founded in 1951, Davao del Sur, and the church in Zamboanguita, Bukidnon, founded in 1994.

Link to Lipa

When I became the coadjutor bishop of Digos in June 21, 2002 I became the pastor of the Cathedral. Being a new comer, it was natural that I inquired about the history of the parish and the unique titular it had. I slowly began to uncover an interesting little story of Mary Mediatrix of all Grace in Digos. First, I found it quite a surprise that according to an earlier research, "for reasons unknown, the patron of the church in Digos was changed to Mary Mediatrix". True enough, when I inquired around, nobody really knew quite well the circumstances of the change of the patron.

With the help of some friends, we discovered later on that the change had something to do with the strange and extraordinary happenings in Lipa in 1948. The parish priest of the church in 1951, Fr. Maurice Levelle, PME wrote, in response to my inquiry, that indeed, the change was related to the Lipa events in 1948.

From San Isidro to Mary Mediatrix

In 1948, the church in Digos was built under the administration of the French Canadian missionaries called the PME Fathers. Initially it had San Isidro Labrador as its patron. When the parish, however, was formally erected in August 22, 1951 the patron was changed to Our Lady "Blessed Virgin Mary Mediatrix of all Graces" to the great displeasure of many inhabitants of Digos.

It became then and now, the one and only church in the entire Davao area with that unique patron.

The negative judgment

In my further inquiry about the story of the Lipa events in 1948, I came to find out about the ecclesiastical investigations done and the final judgment handed down regarding these matters - that there was no divine intervention connected with these. In the light of this negative judgment, I understood immediately when Fr. Levelle PME, the parish priest of the church in Digos in 1951, related in his letter, that after the negative judgment of ecclesiastical officials on Our Lady's apparitions in Lipa, they changed the color of the Mary

Mediatrix image in Digos. This would seem to explain that hardly any reference to Lipa was subsequently made, if at all there was.

The Image of Mary Mediatrix of all Grace

According to one of the "cantoras", at that time, Fr. Levelle came from Manila one day, bringing with him the image of Mary Mediatrix. At first, that image was nowhere to be found in the Cathedral. Instead, the sacristan led me to the bodega where we found the image - dirty, covered with layers of paint and disfigured. It was no longer recognizable.

I had this image restored. After it had been cleaned, it was obviously the image of Our Lady Mediatrix of all Grace with very close resemblance to the image in Lipa Carmel. It still had the name plate with the artist's name on it % Irineo M. Cristobal. Irineo Cristobal was the same artist who was allegedly pointed out by the lady in the apparition to make the image of our Lady of Lipa. Now, that restored image is enshrined once more in the Cathedral in Digos.

The legacy of Msgr. Clovis Thibault, PME

Msgr. Clovis Thibault was then the Prelate of Davao in 1951. He was the one who erected the new parish in Digos under a new titular. At first his role would seem merely ministerial, being the Prelate at the time. But according to a very reliable testimony, Msgr. Thibault was a very close friend of Bishop Alfredo Obviar, the auxiliary bishop of Lipa and chaplain of the Carmelite Monastery around the time of the 1948 events. Even without clear evidence, it would not be difficult to conclude that Msgr. Thibault had a personal interest in the choice of a new titular for the new parish in Digos. It is unfortunate that he had not left any indication of this to anyone now still living nor in any of his writings. I would like to believe, that it was his way of somehow providing a memorial for something he might have considered very significant. And if this were so, then he has succeeded. Notwithstanding the silence and obscurity through all these years, Mary Mediatrix of all Grace still lingers on in the hearts and minds of her devotees in Digos, in Kidapawan, in Zamboanguita, and throughout the country wherever she is known.

From church to Cathedral

Twenty nine years since the time that Mary Mediatrix of all Grace found a home in Digos, the Diocese of Digos was erected on Feb. 11, 1980, with the late Bishop Generoso Camiña as the first bishop. The church in Digos became the Cathedral of the new diocese and has kept the same title.

For 57 years, Mary Mediatrix of all Grace in Digos has kept the memory alive, somehow. It has passed the test of time. The Cathedral Parish is now called to bring the faithful to a renewed devotion to Our Lady, as the Church teaches and encourages. She is called to nurture among the faithful and all peoples, the kind of Marian devotion % living authentic Faith in unity and love.