



# UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

## **The Miraculous Journey of Our Lady of the Rosary La Naval de Manila: From War's Flames to Devotion's Embrace<sup>4</sup>**

Rev. Fr. Pedro Tejero, OP

On December 27, 1941 a squadron of Japanese airplanes flew over the city of Manila, leaving behind a rain of destructive and incendiary bombs. On that fatal day, in a matter of hours, the convent and church of Santo Domingo were reduced to a heap of embers and ashes. Very little or nothing was spared from fire and destruction. The next day, at noontime, the Japanese airplanes hit again destroying and burning the *Beaterio of Santa Catalina*, Santa Rosa College and part of the College of San Juan de Letran and adjacent buildings. Those who witnessed it described the entire scene as dantesque, unforgettable.

Amid these fateful events and misfortunes, what happened to the venerable image of Our Lady of the Rosary (*La Naval*) enthroned in Santo Domingo Church? Thank God the Virgin was spared from flames. The Santo Domingo Fathers, foreseeing the worst possible scenario, a few days earlier, took down the Virgin from her altar and placed it in the safety vault of a building adjacent to the convent, called *Procuración de la Provincia del Santo Rosario*. Three days after these events took place, a group of Dominican Fathers approached the place where the safety vault was. After removing a heap of still smoking ashes, they managed to open the safety vault. With immense joy and feelings of gratitude to God, they saw that the image of the Virgin was unscathed. It had been saved from the fire! With devoted veneration they put in on a wagon and transferred it to the chapel of the University of Santo Tomas. Therein, it was placed at the center of the altar for the cult and veneration of the faithful who came in crowds to see it again on her throne. From the date until its transfer to the convent and church of Santo Domingo, in Quezon City, on October 10, 1954 the Virgin presided and graced all the worship activities, novenas and celebrations of the parish and of the University of Santo Tomas.

The transfer of the venerated image of Our Lady of the Rosary (*La Naval*) to the new church [Santo Domingo Church in Quezon City] took place on October 10, 1954. On that very day, at ten o'clock in the morning, the church was blessed by the Archbishop of Manila, Msgr. Rufino Santos. At four o'clock in the afternoon, around one million faithful had gathered to join and watch the procession. The Virgin, enthroned on a soberly adorned *carroza*, traveled from the chapel of the University of Santo Tomas to Santo Domingo Church. Throngs of people crowded together all along España and Quezon Boulevards. A good number of bishops joined the procession together with the members of the Central Seminary and the UST Dominican community. Upon reaching the church, at sunset, the Virgin was placed at the gate and there the Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was held, presided by Fr. Esteban Gómez, OP, Pro-Vicar General of the Order of Preachers and delegated by Rome to preside at those acts. Since the church was still unfinished, a temporary wooden altar had to be constructed to accommodate the image of the Virgin.

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<sup>4</sup> This excerpt is from an article titled "Fiftieth Anniversary of the Church and Convent of Santo Domingo, Quezon City" by Rev. Fr. Pedro Tejero, OP (1920-2022), originally published in the *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. LXXX, No. 845 (November-December 2004). The title has been revised to provide context for the excerpt.



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The morning of October 11 gave us a pleasant surprise. As soon as the gates of the church were opened, a crowd of faithful filled it up in a matter of minutes. This was totally unexpected. A mass was celebrated but the communicants were so many that there was shortage of hosts to the point that many faithful were unable to receive communion!

We close this historical footnote giving thanks to God, to the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary, and to the many people who worked and made possible such magnificent [chapter in our history]. Surely their names are written in the book of life, in the presence of God, who rewards everyone according to their deeds.■

