

Steve Ray's Open Letter to the Filipino People

[This letter was published in all the major newspapers in the Philippines during one of our visits in 2001]

We stepped into the church and it was old and a bit dark. Mass had just begun and we sat toward the front. We didn't know what to expect here in Istanbul Turkey. I guess we expected it to be a somber Mass but quiet and somber it was not I thought I heard angels joyously singing behind me. The voices were rich, melodic and beautiful. What I discovered as I spun around to look did not surprise me because I had seen and heard the same thing in other churches around the world. It was *not* a choir of angels with feathered wings and halos but a group of delightful Filipino Catholics with smiles of delight and joy on their faces as they worshiped God and sang his praises.

I had seen this many times before in Rome, in Israel, in the United States and other countries. Filipinos have special traits and they are beautifully expressed as I gazed at the happy throng giving thanks to God. What are the special traits which characterize these happy people? I will share a few that I have noticed personal observations as I have traveled around the world, including visits to the Philippines.

First, there is a sense of community, of family. These Filipino Christians did not sit apart from each other in different isles. They sat together, closely. They didn't just sing quietly, mumbling, or simply mouthing the words. No, they raised their voices in harmony together as though they enjoyed the sense of unity and communion among them. They are family even if they are not related.

Second, they have an inner peace and joy which is rare in the world today. When most of the world's citizens are worried and fretful, I have found Filipinos to have joy and peace a deep sense of God's love that overshadows them. They have problems too, and many in the Philippines have less material goods than others in the world, yet there is still a sense of happy trust in God and love of neighbor.

Third, there is a love for God and for his Son Jesus that is almost synonymous with the word Filipino. There is also something that Filipinos are famous for around the world their love for the Blessed Mother. Among the many Filipinos I have met the affectionate title for Mary I always hear from their lips is "Mama Mary". For these gentle folks Mary is not just a theological idea, a historical person, or a statue in a church—Mary is the Mother of their Lord and their mother as well, their "mama".

The Philippines is a Catholic nation—the only such nation in Asia—and this wonderful country exports missionaries around the world. They are not hired to be missionaries, not official workers of the church. No, they are workers and educators, doctors, nurses and housekeepers that go to other lands and travel to the far reaches of the earth and everywhere they go they take the joyous gospel of Jesus with them. They make a somber

Mass joyful when they burst into song. They convict the pagan of sin as they always keep the love of Jesus and the Eucharist central in their lives.

My hope and prayer, while I am here in the Philippines sharing my conversion story from Baptist Protestant to Roman Catholic, is that the Filipino people will continue to keep these precious qualities. I pray that they will continue loving their families, loving the Catholic Church, reading the Bible, loving Jesus, his Mother and the Eucharist. As many other religions and sects try to persuade them to leave the Church, may God give the wisdom to defend the Catholic faith. As the world tempts them to sin and seek only money and fame and power, may God grant them the serenity to always remember that obedience to Christ and love for God is far more important than all the riches the world can offer. May the wonderful Filipino people continue to be a light of the Gospel to the whole world!

Another man's touching perspective on the cultural life of the Philippines. To read [The Hidden Face of the Philippines](#), click [here](#).