

Keeping Ninoy Alive in our Hearts and Minds

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August 21, 2008, St. John Bosco Parish, Makati City

My dear friends, good morning.

It is hard to believe that it's been 25 years since Ninoy descended into the Manila airport tarmac to meet his destiny. I have often wondered if the people whom he deemed were worth dying for would still remember him a quarter of a century later. It is even more difficult to ponder if young Filipinos who never really got to know Ninoy would retain something about him in their memory that would go beyond the name of the airport, the face on the 500-peso bill, or a paragraph in a history textbook.

That is why it fills me with great joy to see young people — some of them not quite 25 yet — revisiting Ninoy and interpreting what he stood for from a fresh, contemporary perspective. One such introspective exercise has given birth to a touching campaign entitled, “I Am Ninoy” which is being launched today with the generous help of merchandise sponsors, media networks, commercial centers and select local governments.

“I Am Ninoy” is a modern-day Filipino’s simple expression of solidarity with those who profess faith in the principles of truth, justice, spirituality, democracy and human rights. It echoes the slogan that we of older generations used to utter proudly on the streets: “Ninoy, *hindi ka nag-iisa*.” To us then, the mood was one of defiance in the face of the brazen tyranny that claimed Ninoy’s life, among thousands of others, and held our freedom ransom.

To younger Filipinos, the atmosphere today hews closer to one of malaise as they search for meaning and direction amid a widespread lack of moral clarity in their society. By proclaiming, “I Am Ninoy,” they remind themselves that the way out of this malaise is in their hands. All it would take is to be true to what they believe in and to surface the hero inside each of them. This often requires the spiritual transformation that in the case of the imprisoned Ninoy saw a traditional politician turn into a selfless servant leader. I am thankful that many among our youth continue to derive inspiration from Ninoy – from seeing our nation, and the world, through his eye.

I am thankful also to the creative minds, tireless spirits and generous sponsors who have given these young Filipinos an avenue by which to express their desire to lend a hand to the less fortunate in our society. In addition to rekindling values like *malasakit*, I understand that the “I Am Ninoy” campaign allows participating establishments to donate part of the proceeds from special merchandise to their chosen advocacies and charities.

Mya I mention in particular Ben Chan who told me when he found out that my doctor is also treating so many other patients and he is not charging them anything, so he'd donate whatever share in the profit he has to this particular foundation of my doctor.

And if you will allow me to be a little immodest, I am what I am today because Ninoy brought out the best in me, and I think I also brought out the best in Ninoy.

So, I was thinking, if all of us here today, all of us Filipinos, will try to bring out the best in our fellow Filipinos, then we can have the country we have long dreamed of. And if it is possible, look to your left, look to your right, and promise that person next to you that you will try your best to bring out the best in him.

I never lose hope that even when people tell *me na parang wala nang pag-asa*, I believe there is hope for us Filipinos and it is for us to do what we can. I was very happy to see here Aries Alif of CARD (Center for Agricultural Rural Development) who has, in fact, been responsible for putting up the micro-finance group and which now has a membership of 500, 000 women, all helping to make this a better life for our fellow Filipinos, and, of course, there is *Gawad Kalinga*.

But I am sure those of you who are here can think of other ways whereby you can bring out the best in the Filipino.

At any rate, I am counting on you. And perhaps you will allow me to nag you if I see that you are not doing anything to make this better place for our country and to bring out the best in every Filipino.

Maraming salamat sa inyong lahat at mabuhay tayong mga Filipino.