

Now Among the Great Cloud of Witnesses

In Remembrance and Celebration of the 100th Birthday Anniversary of Rev. Ruben Malabuyo Sr.

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 53:3-6; 10-12; Hebrews 12:1-2 (text)

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • April 6, 2011

Today, many Christians are being persecuted not only in the southern parts of the Philippines, but throughout the world – tortured, their houses burned, and even martyred. Beginning with Jesus and his apostles, the world has always been hostile to believers. People of all kinds of religions hate Christians.

Why are Christians persecuted and killed? Because in the face of violent opposition, faithful believers refuse to deny their Savior and reject the false teachings of those who persecute them. Thousands of martyrs have suffered death as they stood firm in their embrace of the Biblical doctrine of justification through grace *alone* by faith *alone* in Christ *alone*.

Of such men and women the writer of the letter to the Hebrews spoke about in Chapter 11. These faithful people of God looked forward to God's promises which they never saw. Because although they lived in this world, they counted themselves as "*strangers and exiles on the earth,*" sojourners on their way to "*a better country, that is, a heavenly one*" (Heb 11:13, 16).

Tonight, we gather again to remember and celebrate the life of Rev. Ruben Malabuyo, and to proclaim our hope in his and our own resurrection because the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Although Pastor Malabuyo was not martyred for his faith, he is also one of our "heroes of the faith" because he persevered – with joy! – through all kinds of sufferings and trials in this world. I'm sure that during his last hours, he too counted himself as merely a pilgrim in this world, but now he resides in his homeland – a better city.



We have loved ones and friends, and together with the Old Testament "heroes of the faith," they are our examples in our own pilgrimage in this world. Our text says that they are "*a great cloud of witnesses*" surrounding us. These witnesses are our examples in running and finishing the race of life, just as the Apostle Paul declared at the end of his own race, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim 4:7).

How did Pastor Malabuyo and all of them run and finish the race of life? First, before the race, they prepared and trained body and soul. Next, during the race, they ran with endurance. Lastly, they set a goal, the finish line, where Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, awaits with our prize.

How to Prepare

No athlete goes into competition without preparation. Sometimes, the preparation begins when the athlete is at a very young age. Two things are very important in the preparation: (1) light and small equipment, and (2) disciplined training and repetitive practice.

Light and Small Equipment

In all foot races, whether sprints or long-distance, runners today wear as little and as light as they can. Research continues to produce lighter and lighter shirts, shorts and shoes for running, soccer, basketball, swimming, cycling, mountain climbing and almost all other sports.

Why the obsession with light and small equipment? Because the lighter weight an athlete carries, the faster he performs for a longer time. Speed combined with endurance is the name of the game. Have you ever seen a fat world-class runner? All of them are lean but muscular. How does Manny Pacquiao overpower bigger and much taller boxers? He stays light and by staying light, he maintains his foot and hand speed against much slower boxers.

In like manner, the Hebrews writer exhorts all believers to shed all excess weight, which he uses as a metaphor for sin, *"Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely."* Sin hinders, burdens and weighs down our spiritual growth in our lives. What are some of these sins? John says they are the love of the world and its lusts, desires and possessions. We have ambitions, families, hobbies, sports, Facebook and video games that hinder our focus on Christ and his Word on the Lord's Day and on our daily walk with God. We harbor envy, jealousy, anger, malice and hate against our Christian brethren. All of these are obstacles along the way in our pilgrimage to heaven itself. All of these sins are weighing our lives down and are to be removed and laid aside.

For Pastor Ruben Malabuyo, the most important day in his whole life was always the Lord's Day. He trained his eight children to prepare every Saturday all things needed for the Lord's Day worship services: clothes, time, and even lunch for the Lord's Day. He trained us not to complain when we had to take a two-kilometer walk to church when we did not have enough money to pay for a jeepney ride.

Disciplined Training and Repetitive Practice

Just as an athlete goes through painful physical training and discipline (1 Cor 9:25-27), so Paul endured



1963 Family Picture. Front: Jasmin, Rosario, Levi, Ruben Sr., Liwanag. Back: Eden, Napoleon, Emily, Ruben Jr., Daniel

physical, financial and emotional hardship to preach the gospel to all nations. Repetition makes the athletic performance routine and second nature to the athlete. In boxing, football, or basketball, a player knows instinctively how to respond to all of his opponent's moves because he has rehearsed and played the game over and over before the actual competition.

Pastor Malabuyo, being a former teacher, loved preaching and teaching. He would prepare long and hard for sermons and Bible studies after he came home from his full-time job. He knew it takes diligent study to be true to God's Word. Since he never went to Bible school or seminary, every pay day, he would spend a portion of his salary to buy books so he would learn more about the Scriptures and preach the truth to the congregation. He built his own library in this way.

Likewise, how do you, as a Christian, discipline and train yourself to endure the race of life? Jesus himself tells us one way to train in discipline, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples"* (John 8:31). How would you abide in the words of Christ if not other than regular daily reading and hearing of Scriptures every Lord's Day, at the same time studying, memorizing and meditating on them?

Another Christian discipline that trains you is praying without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17), praying persistently so as not to lose heart and give up the race (Luke 18:1). Paul knows that prayer is the Christian's most powerful resource in the fight of faith, so he exhorts you to *"[pray] at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication"* (Eph 6:18). In the privacy of his terrible affliction when he struggled with cancer, Pastor Malabuyo constantly prayed for strength and comfort.

Before we set ourselves on the starting blocks in the race of our lives, we are to lay aside sin that so weighs down and hinders our walk with Christ. The word of God and prayer are essential parts of regular training in our race of life.

How to Run

The runners are Old Testament "witnesses" (Heb 12:1) who are "commended" for their faith (Heb 11:39). The English word "martyr" comes from a Greek root word that was translated "witnesses" and "commended." Thus, the martyrs of the early church were those who were witnesses to their faith and who gained the approval of Christ and a good reputation among the people.

Our spiritual lives are like a 42-kilometer marathon race, a long distance event. Can you run 42 kilometers, or even just one kilometer, without stopping to catch your breath and rest your legs? This is why athletes train and discipline their bodies and shed extra weight. They have to perform with speed and endurance.

Compared with most of us, Pastor Malabuyo's life was difficult and full of sufferings, but he "ran with endurance the race that was set before him." Our lives are like picnics compared to his nine-year struggle with cancer. All throughout his difficult race, he never complained, never grumbled against God. In fact, when the pain in his body was unbearable, he always prayed to his Comforter.

Likewise, you need endurance in your life's race. The race before us is long. The finish line is never in sight until the last few hundred meters. So while we run the race, our sights are set on the race course, with its twists and turns, uphill and downhill, smooth and rough places, in the heat and cold wind. We can't take it easy because the way to eternal life is narrow and full of obstacles. We have cast aside the sin that weighs us down. And this is what we have trained hard and disciplined our body and soul for.

Near the end of the race, all our preparations, discipline and running through the race of our lives will be in sight. The goal, the finish line, will be around the last turn, the last hill, and the last rough place.

What the Goal Is

"Near the end of Paul's life, he says he has finished the race, fought the good fight, and kept the faith. And at the finish line, there was his reward waiting for him: the crown of righteousness, which is eternal life. As we run the race of life, we are to *"look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,"* as our goal and finish line. When Jesus is our goal, we can keep the faith and finish the long and difficult race set before us.

Unlike many other people today, Pastor Malabuyo's goal was not fame and fortune but to faithfully serve his Master. As a cashier at the Bureau of Customs, he handled a huge amount of transactions daily. Sometimes, customers would tell him, "Keep the change," but he asked his Senior Pastor if it was a sin that he accepted these small gifts.

The hero and goal of our race of life is to be nothing else except Jesus himself. Why? Because no matter how faithful, how disciplined, and how godly the Old Testament saints were, they are not the founder and perfecter of our faith. Only the Spirit of Christ can give us the gift of faith and repentance. Only Christ lived a perfect life to give us perfect righteousness. And only Christ can give us the discipline and endurance required to run the race.

He can do this because he himself endured the race that his Father in heaven set before him. The cross of Christ was the greatest suffering and shame ever endured by any human being, because God poured out his righteous wrath on him as he carried all the sins of his people all the way to the cross. He was despised and rejected by sinful men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And yet, he disregarded his shame and suffering because he was focused on the joy that was set before him at the finish line of his sorrowful race.

This joy is that *"he will see his offspring"*—the multitudes of people that will be accounted righteous on his account. He will *"prolong his days"* into eternity after his resurrection. And he will reign from God's right hand, executing God's judgments, so that *"the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand"* (Isa 53:10).

Conclusion

Beloved friends, consider Christ, who endured his shame and suffering for the joy and glory set before him.

And like Christ, consider the joy and glory set before you when you finish the long and difficult race that God has set before you. Because Christ is the author and finisher of your faith, be assured that he will complete the good work he has begun in you.

Pastor Malabuyo ran his race with perseverance. He has now sprinted across his finish line. He has received his laurel branch of honor and glory – the crown of righteousness. Jesus himself welcomed him at the heavenly gates, saying, *“Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your master.”* The great cloud of witnesses waiting for him from ages back, together with all the angelic host, burst into celebration, saying, *“Welcome home, faithful Pastor Malabuyo, you have completed your race!”*

This is Christ’s promise to all of you as well who are running your race to eternal life, *“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne”* (Rev 3:21). **Amen.**

A Short Biography of Rev. Ruben B. Malabuyo Sr.

Rev. Ruben B. Malabuyo Sr. was born in San Pablo City, Laguna, Philippines, the third of five sons.

He studied for two years at Philippine Normal School, and then taught at the elementary school in San Pablo City.

There he met Rosario C. Fule and they were married in 1937. In 1955, he started as a Cashier at the Bureau of Customs in Manila. Because of the long commute from San Pablo City, he moved his whole family to Tondo, Manila. Since that time, the Malabuyo family became regular members of the then Templo Central here in Moriones Street.

Because of his faithfulness in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, and his diligence in the study of and teaching the Word of God, the church called him to be an Associate Minister (together with Rev. Arcadio Santiago) in 1960. Although he was a full-time employee, he persevered in his duties as a preacher, teacher, and in prayer and visiting the sick and the troubled. His gentle and compassionate presence graced all church events and activities.

In 1971, he was diagnosed with cancer, and had to retire prematurely from his pastorate. In January 1976, he sought medical treatment in the United States where two of his children were already residing. Soon after, four of their remaining six children in the Philippines also immigrated. He went to be with the Lord on August 3, 1980 in San Pablo, California.

He left his wife of 43 years, Rosario Fule Malabuyo (died 1996) and their eight children: Emily Tanquintic of Cainta, Rizal; Eden of Pacifica, California (died 1986); Liwanag of Hercules, California; Ruben Jr. of Balanga, Bataan; Daniel of San Lorenzo, California; Napoleon of Antipolo, Rizal; Jasmin Camacho of Vallejo, California; and Levi of Concord, California. Their third child, Bayani, died in 1949.

