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Beyond “bayanihan”: sTREATfood

STREATfood is an outreach project of Tahilan Residence and Study Center to distribute meals and bottled water to food delivery drivers, guardians of patients in hospitals, and indigent families in the Malate area (Manila).

10/30/2025

The general feel is humid, sticky and oftentimes cramped.

Food stalls line sidewalks, peddling skewered meat as well as other food and drink that provide a quick snack to pedestrians rushing to work, school, or other destinations.

Roosters announcing the start of a new day, children shrieking amid carefree play on the sidewalk, the chitter-chatter of folks hoping to catch up with the latest gossip, and pop star-wannabes singing with abandon in karaoke bars well into wee hours of the following morning all provide an all-too-familiar audio backdrop.

This, folks, is the Philippines.

Not readily evident amid all the hustle and bustle, though, is the spirit of empathy that comes naturally to many Filipinos, especially when the chips are down amid calamities that frequent the country.

And, as demonstrated by ordinary folks around us who shared the little that they had in spontaneous “community pantries” that sprang up nationwide at the height of the pandemic lockdowns, pinoy (as we Filipinos sometimes refer to ourselves) do not let lack of resources stand in the way of such demonstration of solidarity with vulnerable sectors.

It is with such spirit of Christlike compassion that Manila-based Tahilan Residence and Study Center engages in initiatives such as “sTREATfood”.

This monthly activity is carried out by volunteers (mostly Tahilan residents who are students of De La Salle University, De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde Taft Campus, and of the University of the Philippines Manila) who distribute hot meals and bottled water to beneficiaries

within reach — including food delivery drivers, guardians of patients in hospitals, and indigent families — complete with personalized notes of affection, encouragement, or prayers.

SIMPLE, BUT PROFOUND

In the face of grinding poverty that afflicts a chunk of the country's population, these small acts of charity and service may not make much of a dent in this social ill, but they do brighten the lives of others, even if only for a moment. And, hopefully, the momentary joy such acts bring will point beneficiaries to Christ.

The process of sTREATfood is a simple one. Volunteers gather monthly to whip up a filling meal in Tahilan's kitchen, while others work on banners to post around the stalls. Participants deliver the meals as

soon as they complete all preparations.

I recall one particular morning when the rain poured, plunging Taft Avenue and adjacent streets in knee-deep waters.

For a moment, it seemed impossible to proceed with the activity. Pots and pans filled the kitchen sink, while banners risked being soaked. The volunteers and I struggled to keep the freshly cooked meals warm, while others called out to delivery drivers, garbage collectors, and homeless who passed by.

Laughter would break out every now and then, here and there, as we strove to keep the spirit of service alive over the din of heavy rain on roofs.

I realized that day that love does not wait for perfect conditions to thrive. Paired with resilience and prayer, it

is capable of shining through storms, climatic or otherwise.

HIDDEN TREASURE

In many ways, the heart of sTREATfood exemplifies the spirit of Opus Dei: the sanctification of ordinary life.

The busy streets of Manila (where Tahilan is located) makes it easy to lose oneself in the noise of the world. However, each chop of vegetables, each pen stroke, each note neatly folded with a piece of your heart left in it, when offered with love, becomes a silent way to pray in the humdrum flow of daily life. Every action done with thoughts of others and offered to God brings out something beautiful hidden in the simplest of things.

The spirit of service embodied in sTREATfood reflects the Filipino custom of “*bayanihan*”, in which

sweat is sweet when shared together
and joy is amplified tenfold.

Each volunteer, no matter her
contribution, becomes part of a
greater mosaic. It is in this tapestry
that one finds the beauty of being
Filipino — we never face life alone.
We live life together and build
communities glued by empathy.
Hence, is it not our readiness to serve
those in need that confirms our
being Filipino to the core?

But sTREATfood is more than just a
feeding program. It is a way to invite
Christ into our lives and to encounter
Him in the faces of those who receive
what little we have to share.

Each moment we spend, each good
we share with those less fortunate
recalls that encounter of St. Martin of
Tours, the Roman soldier who cut his
cloak to share with a beggar
shivering along a road in the middle
of winter. In a dream that night, he

saw and heard Jesus tell the angels: “Martin, who is still but a catechumen, has clothed me with his robe.” For it was Our Lord Himself who declared: “... [W]hatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for Me.”

INDISPENSABLE

Which is why Opus Dei founder St. Josemaria Escriva made service to the least among us part and parcel of formation in the Work (as Opus Dei — “Work of God” — is called informally) from the beginning of its history: he himself served as chaplain of the Foundation of the Sick in Madrid in 1927-1931, while the youth who had then gathered around him went on regular “visits to Our Lady’s poor” — the homeless, the sick and those abandoned in hospitals — in Madrid.

How special, then, it is to see Him in others, with varied personal

histories, circumstances, and stories, but feeling the same love and warmth that only His presence can bring.

To hand a warm meal to a weary driver or to an exhausted mother is to recognize the presence of Jesus in the least of our brothers and sisters. Each small, brief but profound exchange reminds us that serving others is to serve God.

Ordinary "bayanihan" has the capability to transform into acts of love, as well as prayer. Each Filipino carries within a deep well of joy, empathy, and resilience — and to be Christian is to offer all these to God.

May each meal we share and every act of kindness we bestow on others kindle a light in both giver and receiver that reveals His presence among us.

Chynna Añoover

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