

SIMBAHAY: Flipping Church Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic Uncertainty and Implications to Spirituality

*Joshua Michael G. Jonas*¹
*Benamina Paula G. Flor*²

ABSTRACT

Guided by the relational prayer theory (Baesler, 2002), this paper analyzed how Catholics flipped their homes as church to be saved from COVID-19 uncertainties by attending online masses at the Manila Cathedral (MC). Through Facebook Analytics, the study determined the number of attendees to online masses from March 2020 to March 2021. Implications of mass attendance to spirituality were validated by a survey of 104 MC online mass subscribers through snowball sampling. As triangulate measure, two key informants were interviewed. More than 200,000 tuned in to online masses monthly with an average of 69,863 with the highest frequencies on Sundays. Survey results revealed that one out of three respondents attended the 8:00 AM Sunday mass without fail and who prayed together as a family using smart television. They prayed not to get sick and were thankful for answered prayers and blessings received despite the crisis. As a form of mission and indulgence, they help others and donate to the church or pray fervently to ask for forgiveness. Given the choice, an overwhelming majority wants to physically attend the mass to confess and receive the Holy Communion. It can be surmised that flipping church services from offline to online became a regular Sunday ritual which implies that spirituality can occur anytime, anywhere, especially during a pandemic.

¹ *Joshua Michael G. Jonas* is a university research associate at the University of the Philippines Los Baños Learning Resource Center.

² *Benamina Paula G. Flor, PhD* is a professor at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) and director of the UPLB Learning Resource Center.

SIMBAHAY, a fusion of the words *Simbahan* (church) and *Bahay* (home) in Filipino as a mnemonic explains the behavior of flipping the church through its purpose of Salvation, Indulgence, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habitual, Altruistic, and Yes, we can!

Keywords: *flip service, relational prayer theory, online Mass, prayers, communication*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about many challenges as a global health crisis (WHO, 2020) that pervaded countries from almost every continent. It has severely altered the normal way of life with millions of people infected, dead, and continuously suffering from the deadly virus. Many people lost their jobs, businesses went bankrupt, children's schooling interrupted, and countless people died (The Innovations for Poverty Action, 2020).

Places of worship regardless of creed especially the Catholic Church were not spared. Due to strict community quarantines implemented by the government, the Church had to close and cease the physical celebration of religious activities to help prevent the spread of the virus. The demand to cater to the public's physical health during this time of crisis and attend to their mental and spiritual needs heightened (Castillo et. al., 2020).

The outpour of emotions in thirst for physical exercises of faith was distressingly accepted by the faithful as quarantine measures prevented these. Since the pandemic halted the physical celebration of these activities, the Church needed to take a step forward in bringing itself to the people instead of the people going to it. Coincidentally, the community quarantine began in the midst of the Lenten season in 2020 – a period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in the Church calendar to commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Churches across dioceses of the Philippines and different congregations initiated the online celebration of the Holy Mass, prayer

brigades, simultaneous praying of the rosary, online retreats and recollections, and other events like Eucharistic processions (Castillo, et. al., 2020). Online counseling and pastoral guidance were also provided for the needs of the people. Although there were some cases in which there was no online substitute, such as the sacrament of confession, marriage, funeral masses, and the actual reception of Holy Communion, the Church ensured the safety of the lay faithful without compromising the sanctity of the celebration. Social media ministries were created to flip service from offline to online.

Other than the flipping of celebrations to online, the Church also extended its hand to the nation. Churches may be closed for public Masses, but each family's home with candles lit on the altar while tuned in to Holy Mass online became an individual church itself; for "where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them" says the Lord (Matthew 18:20). Gifts may not have been offered by the people to the altar, but countless aids were convened and were offered to help the poor communities all over the country. People may not have been able to hold hands singing the Lord's Prayer, but countless people shared their time and effort to lend a helping hand to support frontliners, victims of COVID-19, and the many Filipinos wailing in the peripheries of society.

Castillo, et. al. (2020) asserted that "religious and spiritual interventions play a crucial role in public health crisis." They stressed that the faith of the people guided them in finding meaning and acceptance during this pandemic while engaging in the deepest questions about life. These interventions of faith in some way helped provide counsel, refuge, and hope for the faithful who needed these interventions through prayers.

As well, Pillay & Barnes (2020) accounted that the COVID-19 pandemic and endless lockdowns have changed society as a whole including the Catholic Church. It forced the Church to reimagine itself on how to continuously thrive despite the challenges brought about by the virus. The lockdowns have flipped church services and celebrations to go virtual, particularly the sacraments (i.e., Holy Mass).

Through the Relational Prayer Theory, Baesler (2002) believes

that there are inputs or factors that influence the different types of prayer. He stated that these prayers predict various outcomes appealing to the praying individual, in this case, the pandemic. In making sense of these changes in spiritual practices during the pandemic, this experience has been labeled through the mnemonic, *SIMBAHAY* which stands for Salvation, Indulgences, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habitual, Altruistic, and Yes, We Can. *Simbahay* is a fusion of the words *Simbahan* (church) and *Bahay* (home) in Filipino. This is both a literal and figurative interpretation that during the pandemic, each Christian home was flipped to a church.

Objectives

Thus, the study aimed to find out the attendance of the Catholic faithful to online daily Holy Mass celebrations in the Manila Cathedral through Facebook analytics. It also determined the trends of engagement that led to the concept of *SIMBAHAY*. The paper also sought to explain *SIMBAHAY* as flip service.

Literature Review

The Manila Cathedral Facebook Page

The Manila Cathedral, formally known as the Minor Basilica and Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, is considered the mother of all churches in the Philippines. It is located in Intramuros, the walled city of Manila. It was initially built as a small parish church made of nipa and bamboo by Juan de Vivero, a secular priest in 1571. The Manila Cathedral is currently the seat of Jose F. Cardinal Advincula, the 33rd Archbishop of Manila. The cathedral's shrine rector is Rev. Fr. Reginald R. Malicdem, together with him is his assistant, Rev. Fr. Khali Pietre M. Llamado.

The Church made its presence in social media on Instagram (@Manila Cathedral), Twitter (@CathedralManila), YouTube (Manila Cathedral), and Facebook (facebook.com/themanilacathedral). As of September 3, 2021, its Facebook Page had 404,836 likes and 807,401

followers. Services and activities include broadcasts of weekday and Sunday Masses, recitation of the Holy Rosary, music videos of hymns sung by priests of Manila, church traditions like the senakulo and Stations of the Cross, and online reflections and homilies of Cardinal Advincula, Cardinal Tagle, Bishop Pabillo, Fr. Malicdem, Fr. Llamado and other clergy members of the Archdiocese of Manila. Their FB Page also streams events from the Vatican such as General Audiences, and Masses with the pope. The page also serves as an online shop where sacramentals like rosaries and images of the Immaculate Conception, coloring books, devotionals, and calendars among others are sold.

Catholic Church in COVID-19

One of the most evident initiatives of the Catholic Church is the non-stop brigade of prayers. A prayer that resonated almost every day in each broadcast of the Holy Mass was the *Oratio Imperata* for protection against the COVID-19 pandemic. This obligatory prayer was crafted and released by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in January 2020. The prayer consists of intentions for those who have contracted the virus, the health workers, the vaccine developers, those who have died because of the virus, and pleading to the Lord to stop its continuous spread. The prayer ends with an ancient prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary from the 3rd century known as the "*Sub Tuum Praesidium*" or *We Fly thy Protection* (From the Roman Breviary, #333). Angels and Saints are invoked to intercede for the people, including the two Filipino saints, Sts. Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod.

The Church has been made more accessible and easier for the people to partake in its celebrations. For example, the government of South Africa realized the role and importance of the Church and their ability to help the people by providing services and assistance. Niemandt (2019) affirmed this to wit:

... Faithful presence means, taking your bodies, your location, and your community very seriously, as seriously as God in Christ took them: 'Faithful presence invites you to act on the belief that God is giving you what you need to be formed as disciples within your location'. Faithful presence implies a

specific kind of presence in all the places that Christians find themselves – and in such a way that it affirms the integrity of Christian faith...

The experience with COVID-19 showed a clearer understanding that the mission is not solely focused on being present in church but the church present to other people. Apart from the usual Sunday Mass obligation, this time has allowed to put into practice what has been learned and received from the Church. The Church became a beacon of solidarity and networks of compassion, empathy, healing, and emotional support (Pillay & Barnes, 2020).

Spiritual Wellness

During the pandemic, individuals have been trying to maintain their own wellness specifically spiritual wellness. Wellness is defined as the optimal state of health of individuals and groups to realize their fullest potential – physically, psychologically, socially, economically, and spiritually; and the fulfillment of one’s role expectations in the family, community and society (Laude, 2021). Wellness is also defined in the dimensions of mind, body, and spirit. Spiritual wellness, together with the other dimensions are necessary to achieve total wellness. According to Elkins (1999), spirituality is a coping skill; a “switch off button” to negative thinking, even in depression and obsessive disorders.

The etymology of the word “spirit” comes from the Latin word “*Spiritus*” which means breath or life. Deborah Cornah presents spirituality as achieving a sense of purpose, connectedness to self, others, nature and God (or a divine being), a search for harmony/hope/wholeness or finding what completes a person. Spirituality also emanates a sense of transcendence or the sense that there is more to life than what is seen.

The Catholic Church, Social Media, and Communication

The Church has expressed its desire in the use of media and social communication in evangelization. According to Foley (2002) of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the Church has taken a fundamentally

positive approach to the media. Even in the Second Vatican Council, it was described as a “marvelous technical invention” that does much to meet human needs. Social communications is considered to contribute greatly to the “enrichment of men’s minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God” (Foley, 2002).

The Church has a two-fold aim with regard to media. One aspect is encouraging the use of the media for the sake of human development, justice, and peace. Given this valuable role of social communications with the building of society, the Church seeks “honest and respectful dialogue with those responsible for the communications media” primarily to its shaping of media policy. Pope Paul VI encouraged the use of media saying that the Church “would feel guilty before the Lord” if it failed to use media in evangelization. In Foley’s reflection, he says that in using all other media of social communications, we recall that Christ is “the perfect communicator,” the norm and model of the Church’s approach to communication, as well as the content that the Church is obliged to communicate.

Social Media during Crisis Situations

Social media is a term used to define the interaction between different groups and individuals that happens in a virtual community. It is also said that social media helped individuals, particularly the younger generation to discover ideas and manage risks in different situations (Akram and Kumar, 2017). Engaging with social media is varied. Sarmiento (2019) conducted a study to assess the effects of social media to the health and psychological well-being of a person. The paper found how social media have become an important platform for the LGUs to interact with its community members. However, her study also found the weak experience and knowledge of Local Government Units (LGUs) in implementing communication campaigns in social media.

In another study, Congjuico (2014) proved that social media can bring support for LGUs during disasters and risks. Hence, both LGU and its constituents can benefit from it. This is then supported by Misra and Jana (2017) who explained how strong the effects of social networks in influencing the community to different events including disaster and other crisis events.

Social media have become not just an accessory to human life but as

a very significant tool in everyday situation. Chan (n.d) in an article entitled, “The Role of Social Media in Crisis Preparedness, Response, and Recovery” identified four social media functions such as information dissemination, disaster planning and training, collaborative problem solving and decision making, and information gathering. These functions can aid social media tools in improving crisis communication used by different organizations and government institutions. He recommended that social media should be used for crisis management. It must provide and encourage citizens and community members to perform their roles in preparing and managing crisis.

Therefore, it is established in an article published by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (2020) entitled, “Addressing Communication Challenges during an Infectious Disease Emergency Response: State Experiences from the H1N1 Pandemic” that the use of social media since it is an inexpensive communication tool, helped the local government in overcoming problems including security and IT barriers. However, they suggested that a social media policy must be done to avoid confusion or misinformation during the pandemic.

Similarly, the migration of the church to online was caused by a crisis. Thus, in these trying times, the role of the church is equally important which was delivered online. As social media users, it was not difficult for worshippers to navigate FB to do their church obligations.

Theoretical Framework

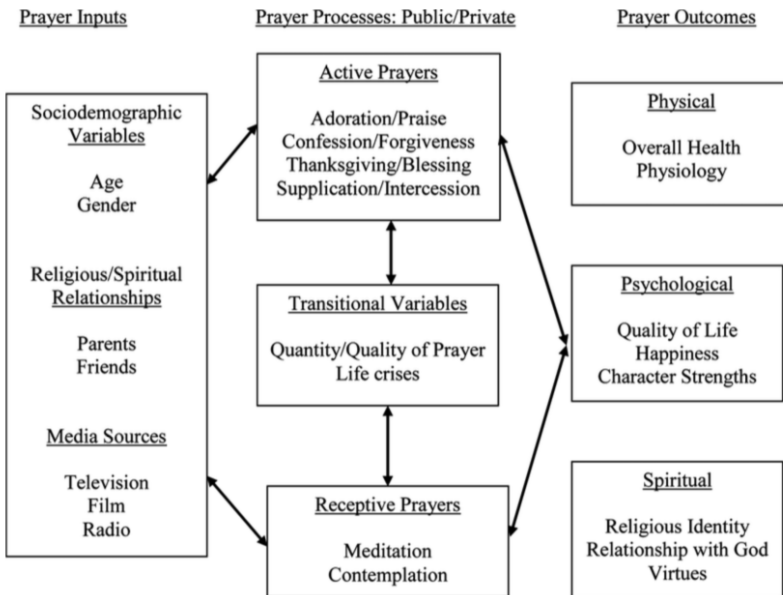
Relational Prayer Theory

The Relational Prayer Theory (2002) posited by E. James Baesler accounts for the different inputs or factors that influence the different types of prayer. Baesler (2002) stated that these prayers predict various outcomes appealing to the praying individual. Different prayer inputs such as sociodemographic variables, religious or spiritual relationships, and media sources served as contributing factors that an individual considers in what kind of prayer to invoke. Active prayers include the basic types of prayers such as adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Receptive or passive prayers consist of meditation and contemplation. Just (2020) said

that active prayers are prayers where an individual engages in practice; he/she is much more specific in certain intentions or requests to achieve certain outcomes. These can also be defined as verbal prayers. Receptive prayers focused more on the natural flow of grace from prayers which are portrayed in meditation and contemplation. These are more of non-verbal prayers that can be exhibited through reading the sacred scripture, appreciating God’s creation in nature or expressions through art and literature, or simply mere silence and solitude.

Active and receptive prayer processes were contextualized either done privately or publicly affected by the quantity and quality of prayers and factors such as life crises. The outcomes of prayers include physical healing, psychological help, and spiritual wellness (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Relational Prayer Theory (Baesler, 2002).



Conceptual Framework

Guided by the Relational Prayer Theory (Baesler, 2002), the study assumed that prayer inputs such as media sources like television, radio, and social media ministry served as channels of communication for Catholics to continue the practice of hearing Mass albeit electronically. Flipping service online allowed Catholics to attend the Holy Mass regularly.

This experience can be labeled through the mnemonic, **SIMBAHAY** which stands for **S**alvation, **I**ndulgences, **M**ission, **B**lessedness, **A**ffordances, **H**abitual, **A**ltruistic, and **Y**es We Can. *Simbahay* is a fusion of the words *Simbahan* (church) and *Bahay* (home). This is both a literal and figurative interpretation that during the pandemic, each Christian home was flipped to a church. These SIMBAHAY concepts are assumed to lead to physical, psychological, and spiritual outcomes.

Salvation refers to the desire of the worshipper to be spared from contracting the coronavirus. This was measured in terms of the number of live views that the online Mass garnered. Hypothetically, it can be surmised that the higher the number of live views, the more Catholics pray to be saved from the dreadful virus. The belief that God can save them from contracting the virus is high because He is the protector of all mankind.

Indulgences point to the desire of the faithful to be forgiven from their sins through confession. This was measured by asking the respondents about what they do because confessions cannot be done virtually.

Mission encapsulates that holding masses online can extend the church services to engage with the faithful despite the absence of physical communion and the rationale to continuously provide spiritual nourishment. This was measured in terms of the different church services offered those respondents attended.

Blessings are those that Catholics must be thankful for from sheer waking up in the morning and receiving help from others and keeping their jobs even if it meant working from home. Attendance in online mass is a blessing because of the propensity to share what one has and what can be received from God. This was measured by asking respondents what they

pray for and how were these prayers answered.

Affordances refer to what online Mass has made possible to worshippers. The focus on listening to the readings and the sermon were made more meaningful because there were minimal distractions during the Holy Mass. This was measured by asking respondents to describe how they hear mass online and what are the benefits and disadvantages of online church services.

Habit points to the transformation of flipping the home to become the church regularly with most doing it on Sundays, holy day of obligation, or special church events that call for the participation of the Catholics. This was measured by asking the respondents about the frequency of attending Sunday Masses.

Altruism alludes to the sacrifices that Catholics make to help others. Donating to the Church as gratitude for providing flip service will not only feed the mind but the inner self that doing good to others is what God wants His followers to do and emulate His goodness. This was measured by asking respondents what they did during the pandemic.

Yes, we can! Establishes that as worshippers online there is nothing impossible to a persistent heart. The ability to shift from offline to online Masses and transforming their homes is an indicator that the faithful is ready to assume whatever mode of Mass celebration. This was measured by asking respondents how they attend online Masses at home.

Thus, it is assumed that *SIMBAHAY* when practiced can lead to outcomes such as physical, psychological, and spiritual that could strengthen the Catholics' faith to continuously pray regardless of mode and with the guidance of the priest, the prayerful can be cleansed from sins for eternal salvation.

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

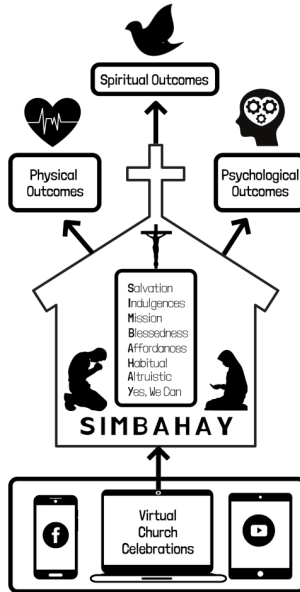


Figure 2. *SIMBAHAY* Model of Flip Church Service

Methods and Materials

This study employs the secondary data analysis research design. According to Cnossen (1997) as cited by McCaston (2005), this refers to the analysis of data or information gathered by others such as researchers and institutions. However, in this study, the second-hand data analysis was based on Facebook analytics of the Manila Cathedral as subject of the study. Data on online Mass attendance was based on the actual number of live views for daily Masses and compared those on the average monthly attendance from March 2020 to March 2021.

Data was tracked, encoded, analyzed and interpreted as determinants of *SIMBAHAY*, which can be categorized into physical, psychological, and spiritual outcomes. Graphs were created to explain the results and interpreted. The trend in attendance of worshippers served as grounding in interpreting the practice of flip service in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was validated by tracking the live streaming of a Sunday Holy Mass and determining which part of the Mass was most engaging measured by the highest number of attendees.

As triangulate measure, a one-shot survey among respondents who were attending online masses at the Manila Cathedral were surveyed through snowball sampling. Two key informants who have also attended masses at MC were interviewed to validate secondary data gathered.

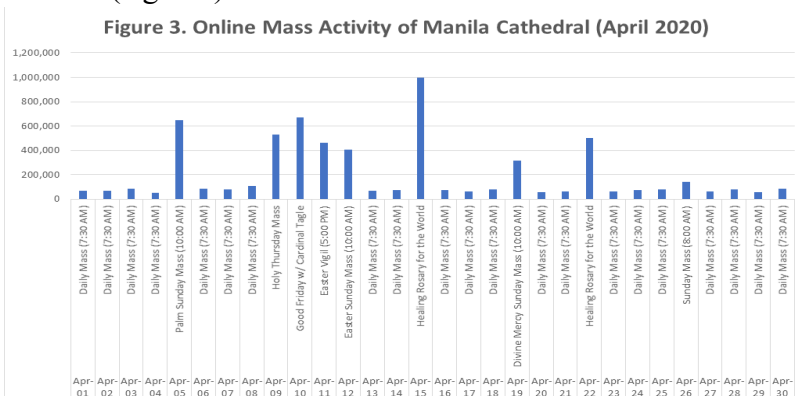
Results

Attendance in Online Holy Mass Celebrations

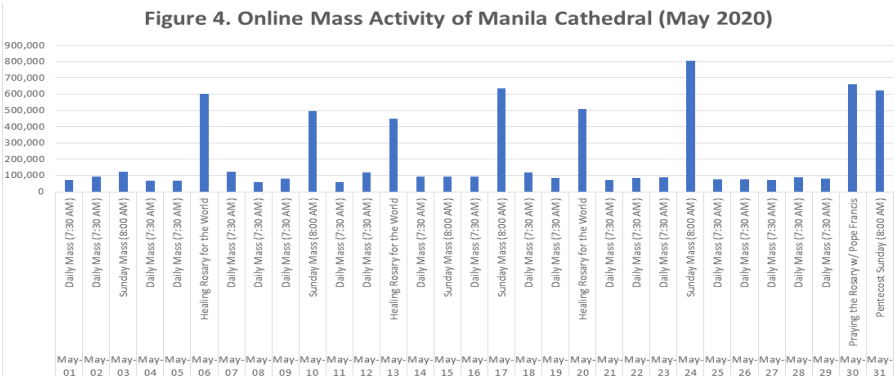
Online attendance to the 7:30 AM and Sunday 8:00 AM Masses was tracked daily and on a monthly basis (other Masses held daily were not included). After which, average daily views were computed to determine attendance for the period observed.

For the month of March 2020, tracking started on March 14, 2020, the first online Mass on MC. From March 14 to 31, the total live views was 1,117,800 in 16 days with a daily average of 69, 863 having the highest peaks on Sundays. The lowest number of views was on March 17 with 21,000 and the highest on March 29 with 125,000 views. Other than Sundays, feast days also were highly accessed like the Solemnity of the Annunciation of Mary on March 25 with 111,000 live views (Figure 2). This implies that special events and Sundays usually were highly attended compared to daily masses in the morning.

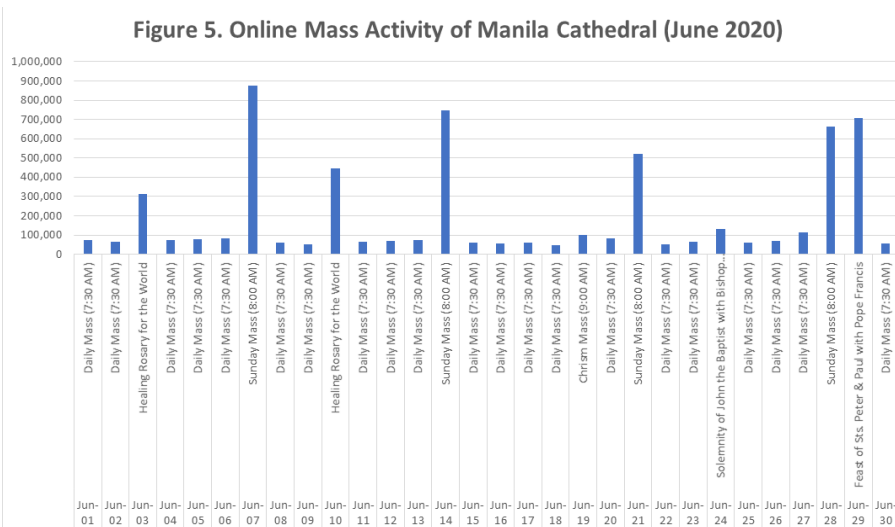
In April 2020, which observed the Lenten season, the highest number of live views was on April 15, the praying of the Healing Rosary for the world with 1M. A total of 6,223,600 live views was registered with a daily average of 207,453.3333 (Figure 3).



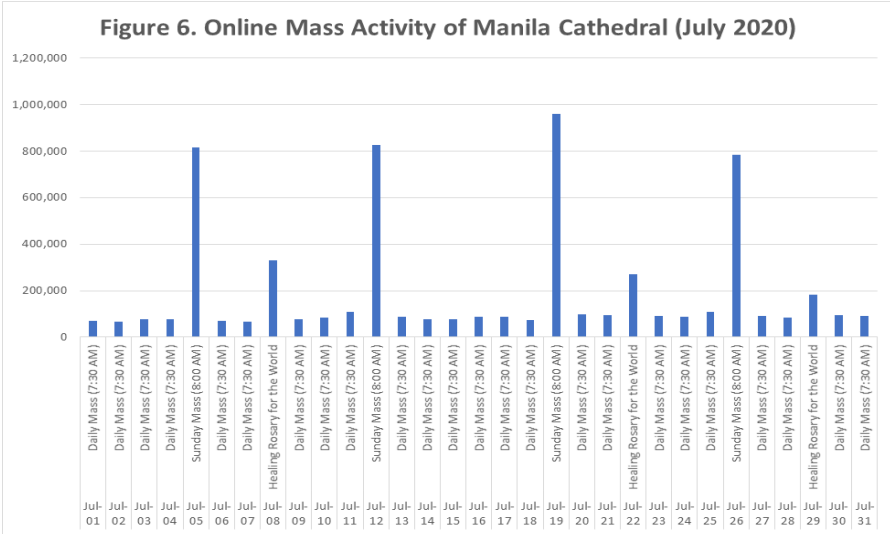
In May 2020, there was a total of 6,760,200 live views with a daily average of 218,070.9677. The highest views include Palm Sunday, the Holy Week celebration of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil, as well as the Easter Sunday Mass. The highest number of views for this month was the Healing Rosary for the world on April 15. The lowest attendance was on May 8 with 59,800 and the highest with 807,200 on May 24, a Sunday (Figure 4).



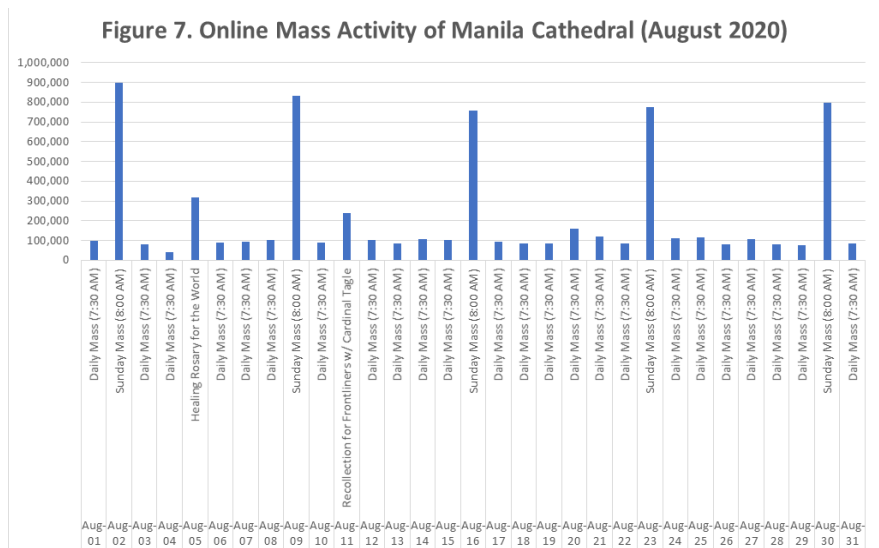
In June 2020, a total of 5,922,900 live views were registered. Of these, the average daily live views was 197,430. While the June trend seemed to decline, the highest number of live views was on June 7 with 873,700 and the lowest at 49,100 (Figure 5).



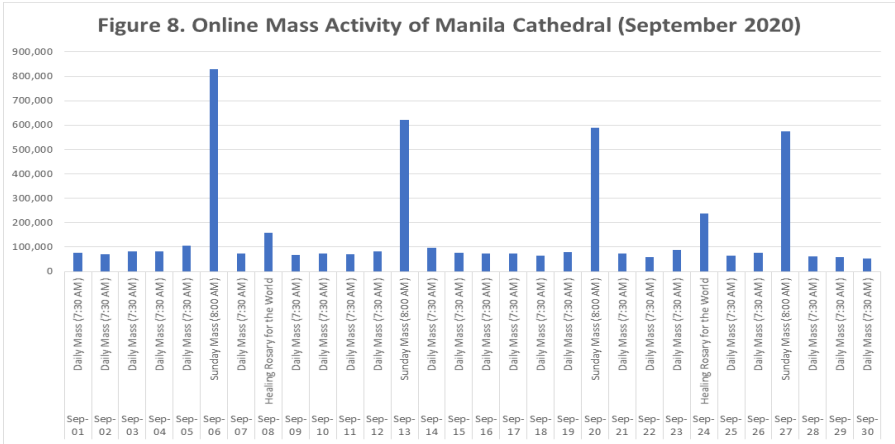
In July 2020, the total number of live views was 6,196,100 with an average daily view of 199,874.1935. The highest live views were on July 19 at 959,500. The lowest was 66,400. Apparently, the trend appears increasing in terms of daily views (Figure 6).



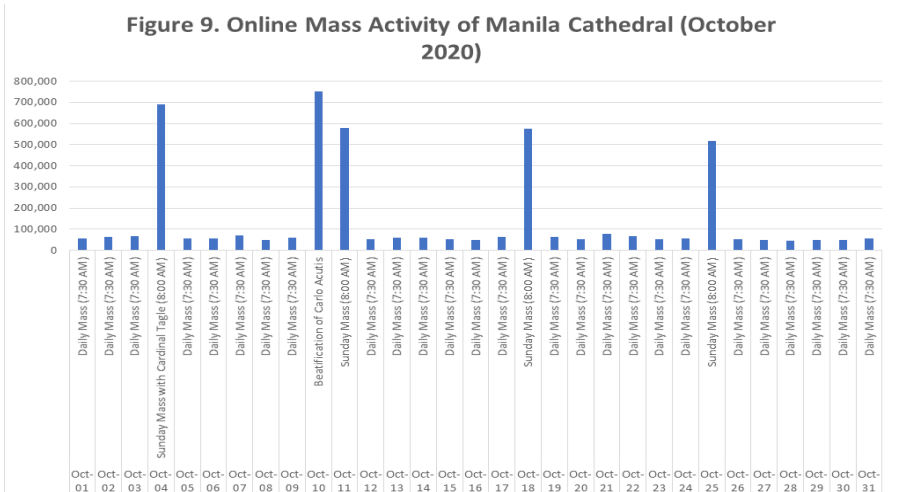
In August 2020, MC’s online 7:30 AM and 8.30 Sunday Masses had almost 7M (6,886,900) live views with a daily average of 222,158.0645. The highest attended ceremony was on August 2, a Sunday with 898,300 live views (Figure 7).



In September 2020, a total of 4,796,800 attended the online masses observed with a daily average of 154,735.4839, quite a dive from the previous months of at least 2M. The highest number of live views on September 6 was 829,300 and the lowest at 54,100 (Figure 8).

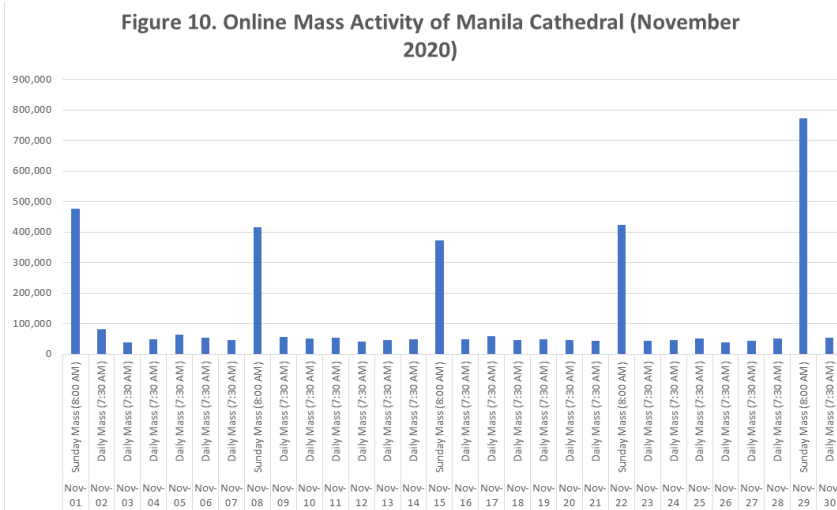


In October 2020, a total of 4,590,800 viewed the online Masses being tracked with a daily average of 148,090.3226. The highest views were on October 10 with 750,100 during the Beatification of Carlo Acutis. The lowest registered views was on October 8 with 47,400 (Figure 9.).

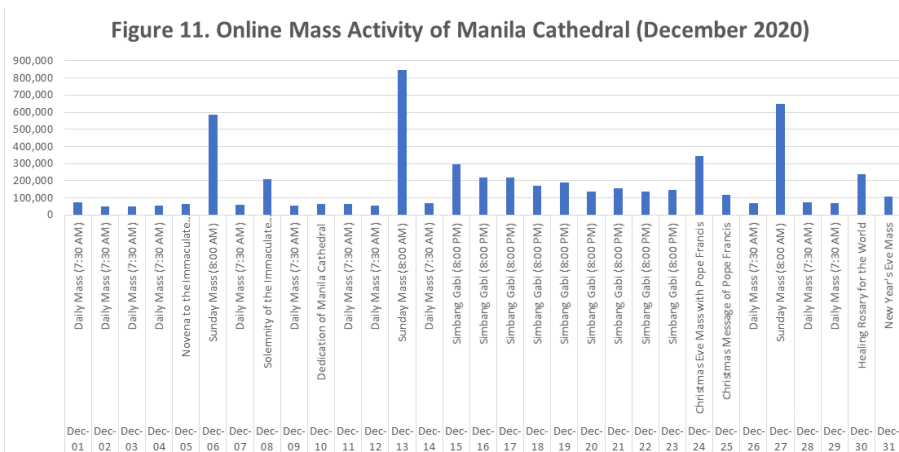


In November 2020, the total number of live views dropped to 3,717,700 with a daily average of 123,923.3333. The highest number of

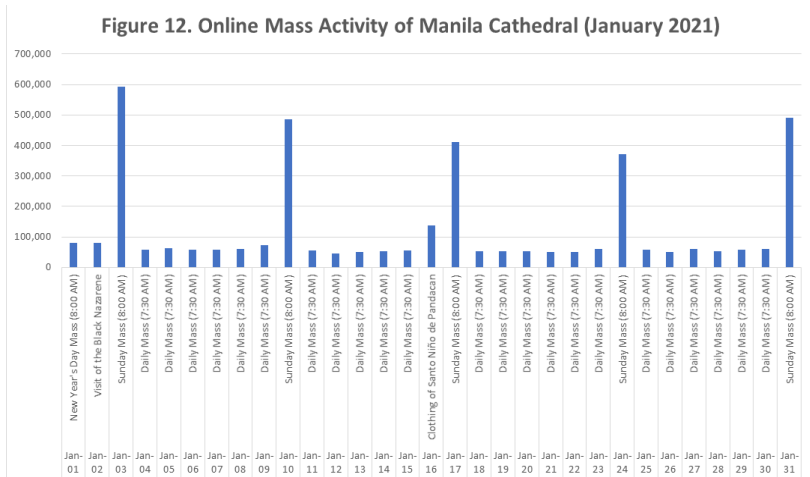
live views was on November 29 with 772,600 while the lowest daily live views was 42,400 (Figure 10). This figure is 3M less compared to the previous months.



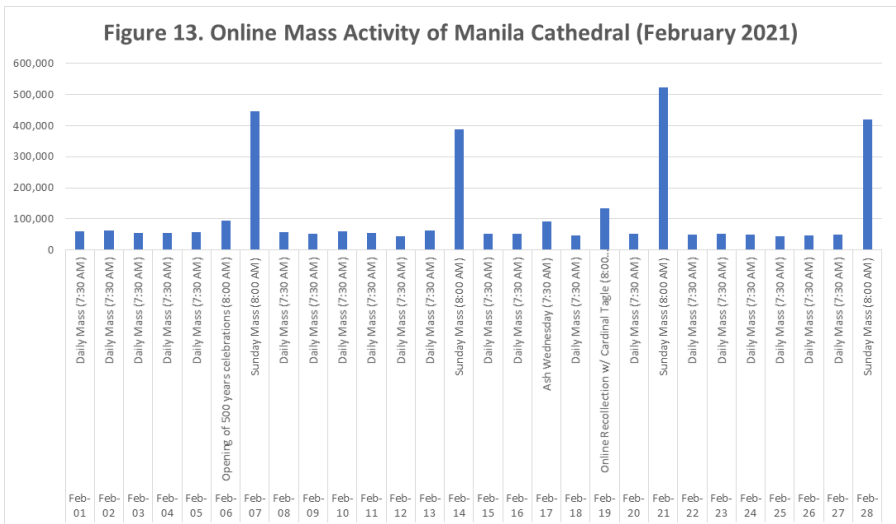
In December 2020, the tracking included the special events, the Simbang Gabi and Christmas and New Year’s Eve. The total number of live views increased to 5,639,600 with a daily average of 181,922.5806. The highest views were made on December 13 with 845,400 and the lowest on December 2 at 49,000. The figures increased highly due to the Simbang Gabi celebrations. Surprisingly, Christmas Eve had 342,800 live views while New Year’s Eve had only 107,100. It could be that preparations for the events were prioritized but the consistent attendance to the daily Simbang Gabi as tradition may have compensated for it (Figure 11).



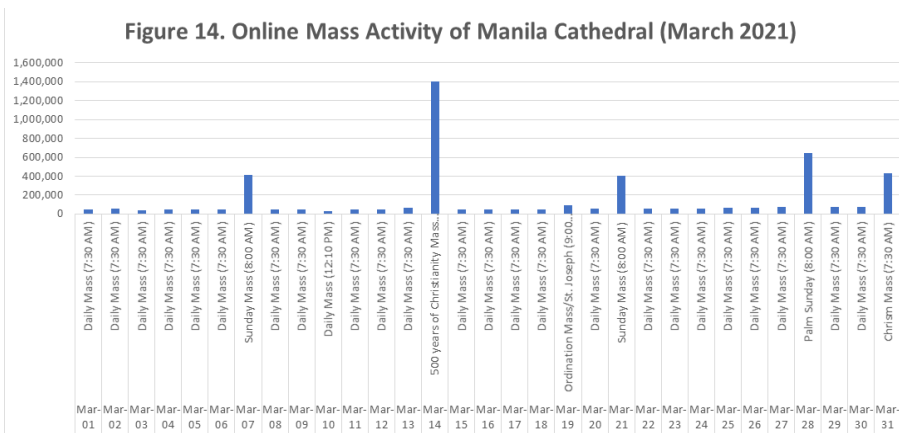
The following year, 2021, the January live views registered at 3,936,700 which was again a deep dive from the figures in December 2020. The daily average was 126,990.3226. The highest number of live views was on January 3, a Sunday at 593,800 while the lowest was on January 26 with 49,500 (Figure 12).



In February 2021, MC had a total of 3,207,200 with a daily average of 114,542.8571. The day with the highest number of live views was on February 21 with 523,500 while the lowest was on February 25 with 43,700 (Figure 13). The last month of tracking the data was made in March 2021.



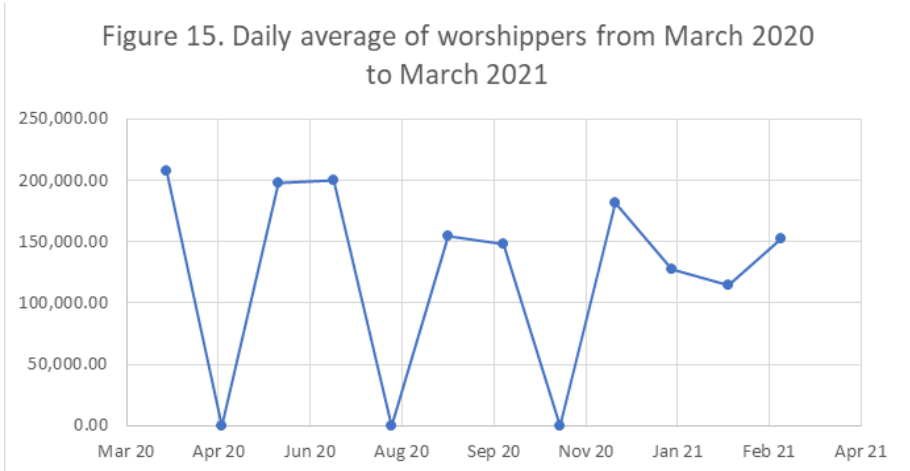
For this month, the total number of live views was 4,724,700. The highest number of Mass viewed was on March 14, one year after the first Holy Mass went online with 1,400,000 to coincide with the celebration of the 500 years of Christianity Mass (with Pope Francis). It had a daily average number of live views at 152,409.6774. The lowest number of live views was 42,400. While the trend appeared to be declining, the numbers were still high (Figure 14). The highest ever was made on March 14 as a manifestation of being a Catholic. It can be surmised that the number of people attending the daily Masses has been consistently high albeit intermittently.



Trends of Engagement Leading to the Concept of *SIMBAHAY*

Engagement in FB can also refer to the number of those actually seeing or attending the Masses online. Looking at the monthly averages from March 2020 to March 2021, a pattern seemed to surface a fluctuating trend in accessing the online Masses of the Manila Cathedral held in the mornings (Figure 15). Note that these figures only captured one daily Mass schedule. It could be that the rest of the worshippers have attended other Holy Masses scheduled within the day.

These trends in engagement seem to allude to how worshippers have allocated their time for worship given the predicament that they are in. The huge number of attendees from 69,863 to more than 200,000 per day implies that flipping the home as church has gone a long way.



Profile of Respondents

Of the 104 respondents, age ranged from 16 to over 70 with a mode between 21 to 25. Almost 70 percent (72 or 69.20%) attended college with almost 29 percent (30 or 28.8%) having an advanced degree (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Age Range	n	%
16-20	8	0.96
21-25	14	13.4
26-30	13	12.5
31-35	11	10.57
36-40	5	4.80
41-45	10	9.61
46-50	10	9.61
51-55	9	8.65
56-60	6	5.76
61-65	8	7.69
66-70	9	8.65
71-75	1	0.96
Education		
Elementary	0	0
Junior High School	0	0
Senior High School	1	1.00

College	72	69.20
Graduate School	30	28.80
Not Applicable	1	1.00
TOTAL	104	100%

Attendance to Church Activities

Respondents were asked about the schedule of the Sunday Mass did they attend. Almost 32 percent (33 or 31.7%) attended the 8:00 AM Mass followed by the 10:00 AM with 32 (30.8%). Respondents also attended other online celebrations like online rosary, Simbang Gabi, Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feasts of the Saints, etc. in adherence to the mission of the Church. In terms of frequency of attendance to the online Mass, more than the majority (60 or 57.7%) attended Sunday Mass without fail (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by attendance to Sunday Mass and other celebrations

Time	n	%
8:00 AM	33	31.7
10:00 AM	32	30.8
12:00 PM	4	3.8
6:00 PM	20	19.2
Others	15	14.5
Other celebrations		
Online Rosary	46	44.2
Simbang Gabi		
Masses	55	52.9
Feasts of the Virgin		
Mary	37	35.6
Feasts of the Saints	17	16.3
<i>Urbi et Orbi</i> Blessing	9	8.7
Papal events	18	17.3
Others	10	10.0
None	4	4.0

Frequency of attendance

Every Sunday without fail	60	57.7
Every other Sunday	15	14.4
Once a month	10	9.6
Others	19	18.3
TOTAL	104	100

Medium Used in Accessing the Online Mass

Less than half (50 or 48.1%) used television (smart TV) to hear Mass while a little over 40 percent (43 or 41.3%) had mobile/cellular phones. Almost all (101 or 97.10%) have their own internet connection or WIFI at home (Table 3).

Table 3. Medium used in accessing online Mass

Medium	n	%
Television (Smart)	50	48.1
Mobile/Smart phone	43	41.3
Laptop/Computer	42	40.4
Tablet	15	14.4
TOTAL	104	100
Connectivity*		
Own internet connection (WiFi)	101	97.1
Own internet connection (LAN)	6	5.8
Cellular data	11	10.6
Internet connection from others	1	1

*multiple responses

Manner of Attendance

Respondents were also asked to describe how did they attend the online Mass. Almost two-thirds (69 or 66.3%) heard Mass together as one family. They were also asked to depict what is the situation at home while hearing Mass. Almost half (51 or 49%) said there were little distractions like dogs barking, asking for alms, etc. but as much as possible avoid it unlike in

the church which was more solemn. Some (39 or 37.5%) lit candles during the Mass, seated in front of the altar (26 or 25%), put a cross on a clean table (24 or 23.1%). Majority (57 or 54.8%) had gadgets placed on the table. A big majority (61 or 58.7%) tuned in to the Masses on time. The same percentage (38 or 36.5%) disconnected during the recessional or after showing the donation account numbers. When asked if they donated to MC, 74 or 71.2% said no (Table 4).

Table 4: Description of manner of attending the online mass

Attendance type	n	%
Together as one family	69	66.3
Alone	28	26.9
Together as a community	1	1
Others	6	5.8
Situation at home		
With some distractions	51	49
See to it that there will be no distractions	31	29.8
Solemn just like in the church	22	21.2
Preparing the home		
Gadget on the table	57	54.8
Lit some candles	39	37.5
Seated in front of the altar	26	25
Cross on a clean table	24	23.1
Have some flowers at the altar	9	8.7
Preparing the self		
Be presentable	42	40.4
As is (the moment you wake up)	28	26.9
Take a bath before attending mass	20	19.2
Wear clean clothes	14	13.4
Time tuned in		
On time	61	58.7
		24
15 minutes before the scheduled time	25	
FB Notification	8	7.7
Gospel Reading/sermon	0	0
Others	10	9.6

Moment disconnected

During the recessional	38	36.5
After showing the donation accounts	38	36.5
After Communion	7	6.7
Others	21	20.3

Donated to MC

Yes	30	28.8
No	74	71.2

TOTAL	104	100
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Kinds of Prayer

Respondents also shared what they prayed for. Almost 30 percent (30 or 28.8%) prayed that they will not get sick while more than 15 percent (17 or 16.3%) said not to get infected with COVID-19. They were also asked what prayers they thought were granted and why. They said that their prayers were answered because they were safe, well, physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy.

Table 5: Distribution of prayer intentions

Kinds of prayer	n	%
Not to get sick	30	28.8
Not to get infected with COVID-19	17	16.3
For our family members who are health workers	11	10.6
For scientists and researchers to discover vaccine	3	2.9
For our health workers' safety	3	2.9
Have enough stock of food and amenities at home	2	1.9
Others (personal)	38	36.6
TOTAL	104	100

Disadvantages and Indulgences

While they said it was convenient to hear Mass at home there were challenges like dropping internet connection due to poor signals, but

the greatest constraint was not being able to confess and receive the Holy Communion. This is why when asked what indulgences do they make, they said that they practiced fast and abstinence, and donated to Caritas Manila, almsgiving, asked for forgiveness to God, and gave financial help, etc. They also said that they helped others during the pandemic. They gave food to drivers, frontliners, prayed for them, and donated, etc. They shared their blessings with others.

Finally, they were asked what they would do in case regular attendance to church will be allowed and without the pandemic, an overwhelming majority (84 or 81.6%) said they will attend mass physically.

Discussion

The FB analytics provided an anchor to explain the behaviors of Catholics during the pandemic. The first online Mass during the pandemic on March 14, 2020, displayed that people prayed more for **Salvation**. Every practicing Catholic gave an outpour of prayers and intentions to spare themselves and the whole world from the devastating coronavirus. This was also what the survey respondents prayed for.

People offered **Indulgences** for the benefit of others during this period of trial. In Catholic terms, to be indulged is to be remitted from the entire temporal punishment for sin. The term plenary indulgence is obtained to be free from all attachments of sin in one's soul. However, Pope John Paul II exclaimed in a general audience in 1999, indulgences are not quick tickets to heaven. "It is only an aid for the real conversion that leads to happiness." Respondents also resorted to indulgence to repent for their sins in the absence of the Sacrament of Confession.

On March 27, 2020, Pope Francis delivered a special *Urbi et Orbi* blessing to Rome and the whole world to pray to end the COVID-19 pandemic. This blessing is usually a colorful event and is attended by thousands of pilgrims in the Vatican and is reserved only for Christmas Day and Easter. It was extraordinarily bestowed unto the whole globe who were confined in the safety of their own homes. He said that plenary indulgence shall be

bestowed to all the faithful who will watch or listen. Pope Francis exposed the Blessed Sacrament imparting his Apostolic Blessing to everyone tuning in via television, radio, and social media.

It has become a **Mission** of everyone to help make the world a better place by attending the various events offered by MC. MC offered different church services available for access. Attending online celebrations like online rosary, Simbang Gabi, Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feasts of the Saints, etc. is an adherence to the mission of the church. As members of the church, it is also part of the faithful to attend these events as an obligation.

People continued to pray for **Blessings** for family, friends, relatives, and the rest of the world due to the lack of resources limited by lockdowns. This was evident in the survey and the KII as they were thankful that prayers were answered. They also shared what they have even if they do not know where to get the next resource. Any extra income that they got was shared with the needy because they empathized with them. Empathy is a technique in psychology where one looks at a situation through the perspective of those involved and not merely as a spectator. Through this, hearts and minds become more open to be filled more abundantly with God's graces that flow to other people.

The **Affordances** that people got from hearing Mass from home by understanding the words of God better because they can focus to the readings and the sermon with little distractions. The opportunity to reflect and act made sense of how people can better themselves. Before the pandemic, it was difficult to fit into one's schedule attending Holy Mass. Now, one could easily attend Sunday Mass in the Vatican celebrated by the Pope himself made possible through telecast and livestreams. Even the online *visita iglesia* allowed people to visit different churches while praying the Stations of the Cross in the safety of their homes. Practicing one's faith has never been this easy; through technology, connections were made stronger and more accessible form of worship.

Practices as Catholics during these trying times became a **Habit**. It has become the normal way of life. Each has their own routines in practicing their faith, from daily online Masses, simultaneous praying of the *Oratio Imperata*, praying of the Angelus and the 3'o clock

habit, and the evening rosary. Different groups opt to pray together via videoconferencing applications. Prayer is the means of communication to God. Having candles of one's home's altar lit in every online mass has been an automatic move as a signal that it is time for prayer. Attending online Sunday Mass or holy days of obligation transformed Sunday activities during the pandemic. Weekends normally are spent outside the home and may miss attending the Holy Mass. However, during the pandemic, everyone stays at home which led to the development of flipping the church online and the habit of helping others if needed. Respondents' attendance to the Sunday Masses became habitual and even praying the rosary. According to one of the key informants, "praying the rosary was done daily which became routinary."

Altruism is to have that unselfish concern for others. This character should be embodied most especially during this pandemic where everyone is struggling hard to survive each day. In an article by J. Maximiano (2018), he considered the Catholic Church as the world's biggest charitable organization. Some may believe that the Church is a spiritual institution alone, but it has addressed not only the spiritual needs of the people but also the corporal needs.

Caritas Manila, a social action group of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, immediately responded to the needs of the community by donating P1-billion worth of gift certificates to around 4 million poor individuals across 10 dioceses in the country. According to a report in Radio Veritas, Fr. Anton Pascual, the head of Caritas Manila, they distributed the donations through their *Oplan Damayan* program through the generosity of businessmen and individuals who are partners of Caritas Manila. Each parish church from every diocese had its own initiatives by spearheading donation drives, feeding programs, fundraising activities, and community pantries. Donations did not always have to be done physically. The emergence of easy money transfer applications such as GCash and Paymaya, allowed donations to different programs. Solidarity spread like a virus through every community where selfishness had no room. Respondents and interviewees were open to help others as evidenced by their actions during the pandemic.

If people were asked if they can thrive in this pandemic, the

answer could be **Yes, we can!** The Church is a vessel of healing in these most trying moments. It serves as a venue for consolation and recovery from sins and shortcomings. In hospitals today, priests visit the patients even in the most dangerous of encounters. News about a noble priest took the risk of anointing a critically ill COVID-19 patient the last sacrament despite the risk making him a suspect for quarantine. The ability to shift from offline to online masses and transform their homes is an indicator that the faithful is ready to assume whatever mode of Mass celebration.

Implications of *SIMBAHAY* as Flip Service

The flip service points to the new normal of worship. It may mean that Catholics have resorted to online attendance to the holy Mass because there was no other way of doing it as a form of response to crisis communication. The various obligatory prayers like the *Oratio Imperata* and the suggested list of intentions in the Catholics' daily rosary have contributed to the heightened communal prayer that led to its amendment. This is an empirical result that prayers can indeed move mountains if people pray together as one.

The high engagement or live views of one daily schedule at the Manila Cathedral displayed how desirous Catholics are to listen to the Word of God. This number could possibly be more if all mass schedules were investigated. The sustained attendance could also be attributed to how Fr Kali's and Fr Regie's sermons may have influenced to continuously participate in online Masses. These sermons were shared in *Taglish* to ensure that the teachings were understood. One of the key informants said that the footage of MC is well-planned which entices one to attend and listen attentively. She even read the assigned readings prior to hearing mass to better understand those.

Flipping the church led to the development of a new worship culture which has changed how the Filipino Catholics have transformed the way the online Masses were designed. This design that starts 15 minutes before the schedule was to give time to the faithful to prepare. It opens with requests for Mass intentions that run for at least five minutes which implies the high number of people who want to pray for their

families, death of a loved one, or recovery from COVID-19. This also connotes that these requests may come with donations as support to MC's sustenance and continuous flip service to the online congregation. The Mass ends with a list of bank accounts of MC for prospective donations so that the Church can help others as well. This in a way shows how the congregation has been working together even if they are not physically present in the church.

The ability of the Church to gather its flock through its social media ministry has successfully delivered and gathered God's followers to join as one church albeit in their own homes. This arrangement is a necessary step to ensure that the faithful always remain with the church regardless of delivery mode. The flip service may continue to be so beyond the pandemic of the new social order created by the pandemic.

The mnemonic, **SIMBAHAY** (Salvation, Indulgences, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habit, Altruism, and Yes, We Can) aptly explains why engagement is high. People ought to have a healthy mental health by feeding both psychological and spiritual needs. Through flipping the church at home, it became the practice to attend online Masses that strengthened religiosity. The use of social media to propagate attendance to online Masses has created a sense of self-preservation and protection due to this intervention. Being prayerful and holding on to prayers somehow played a significant role in addressing anxieties and reducing uncertainty. The ability of the religious to pray with the presence of the priest and other religious online together had created a ripple effect among Catholics.

Trials and tribulations in these trying times are indeed a burden to one's mind and heart. One's peace of mind may be too hard to grasp in the current situation. Despite all these, trust in God is a must; as simple as it may seem, believing in his ability to deliver people from these is indeed a leap of faith – a leap worth risking to the strongest of hearts. He is not deaf to prayers. He is omnipresent and ever-loving to His children. God does not permit endless sorrow. *“For the more we sorrow in the present, the greater will be our joy in the future.”* – St. Isidore Seville.

Given the results, it can be construed that spiritual, physical, and environmental outcomes indeed envelop the need for flip church service that social media made possible.

Conclusion

These opportunities provided by technology paved the way for people to observe the different points of *Simbahay*: Salvation, Indulgences, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habit, Altruism, and Yes, We Can. *Simbahay* posits that the Church is not confined to the corners of the physical structure of worship but the wholeness of people as members of the Church and what has been done as followers of Christ even in the safety of one's own homes. All of which are embedded in the prayer processes of an individual be it active or receptive. Through *Simbahay*, prayers are fulfilled and answered which eventually led to desired outcomes be it physical (health, recovery, surplus of necessities), psychological (happiness, sanity, calmness), or spiritual (divine providence and fulfillment).

Pope Francis says that this pandemic gives people the chance to give way to positive change and reconnect with the real world. There is a need to appreciate how vital the role of the Church is for Catholics, that one's faith practices are not mere routines but essential actions as followers of Christ. This time paved the way for people to deviate from all the distractions of life and focus on the more important aspects – health, families, and an unshakeable relationship with God. This pandemic is a mere challenge than can be overcome if there is faith in God. People must not be afraid because the Lord God will always be with people and will never forsake them (*Deuteronomy 31:6*).

The pandemic may have become an obstacle to physically attending offline Masses, but it has also afforded an opportunity to reflect and renew oneself. It became a state of survival in these trying times and with *Simbahay* people will survive the pandemic or beyond and **Yes, we can!**

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