

## THE BEST GIFT IS HOPE

Tony Meloto

This Christmas I realized is my happiest, despite the doom and the gloom I watch on television or read in the papers, because there is so much goodness in my world. Thank you for being a part of it.

Every day I walk with heroes.

Some are successful and powerful who use their resources and influence for the good of many. Most are ordinary day to day heroes who sacrifice their time with family or work to be with the less fortunate. Like the Three Kings and the shepherds, they follow the star to give hope and the priceless gift of self to the abandoned and the suffering in their search for the Savior, who came to bring glad tidings to the poor.

Every day for me is Christmas.

There is no absence of generosity or goodwill or good faith around me. People are in a giving mode all year round when they realize that they can truly make a difference and they can see where their efforts and resources are going. Vision and values are important for many to believe. Credibility is the key that opens heroic generosity.

Every day I see hope for our country.

This is the country of my deepest affection, a gift from God that I treasure. This is the country that still nurtures my belief that the greatest source of hope came to the world in the lowliest circumstances over two thousand years ago – not with economic or military might, without prejudice to color, race, status or gender. It is my faith that it is possible in this land for us to create wealth and spread it, by simply living out our greatest qualities as a people – *kalinga* and *bayanihan* – caring and sharing. This is the only way that I know for me to fulfill the dreams of our forefathers and live out the tenets of our Christian faith – to be my brother's keeper, leaving no Filipino behind. This not only includes but prioritizes the needs of our Muslim brethren and those of other faiths who belong to the minority and are often forgotten.

Starting this Christmas, I pray that more Filipinos can be radical optimists.

Let us consciously spread hope by seeing the good in others, starting with our informal settlers and slum dwellers and the poor farmers and fisher-folks in the countryside, and wishing well and supporting all those who are helping them.

Let us make it our prayer for the day to come that no Filipino will be landless or homeless in this country where there is enough land for all. Likewise, let us make it our firm resolve to harness every idle hand and every idle land to plant and produce until we achieve abundance and no one is hungry among our people. This is not just about capital or technology but about justice and leadership. Social justice is the gift that we can give to the poor that will please the Father, if we look at the mission of the Son as the way to His heart. We need to lead everyone, by example, along this path.

With the recession and depression in the more affluent countries, the Mumbai incident, the growing unrest in Thailand and Malaysia – two Asian neighbors that many thought had it all figured out, it is clear to me that we are not so bad after all. I do not say this for us to gloss over our problems or to exonerate those who are responsible for our woes, but for us not to lose heart or blame one another or bash our country. Definitely, the global recession will affect us but it can also trigger heroic sacrifice among our people. We can turn adversity abroad into opportunities at home. We can start to produce and patronize world-class products instead of importing contaminated goods. We can channel our investments and philanthropy to the Philippines like what many migrants, expats and overseas workers are doing. They are investing in real estate and local businesses with the uncertainty of the stock and money market abroad, and helping the needy in our country, not just their relatives. Gawad Kalinga, and its mission of nation-building, is helping spur patriotic investment and philanthropy to the motherland. Many local corporations are going beyond conventional CSR and investing in viable and effective social enterprises.

Let us continue to pray for our business climate to improve, for investments to pour in, for the GDP to rise, for profit to grow a bigger social conscience, and for the day to come when transactions can be conducted more ethically without resorting to bribes and other corrupt practices. Love for God and country will help us overcome this global economic crisis, and ultimately, free us from poverty and corruption.

Let us not get tired of doing what is good and what is right.

For those of us who are over fifty, let us invest the remaining years of our life building a better world and a future full of hope for our children. Let us not consider ourselves too old or the time too late for us to make a difference. Let us turn our regret into reform and offer our country our energy, our expertise and the greatness of our spirit. This is the way of hope for many of us: the best caring for the least...raising the least to become their best...leaving no one behind...seeing no one as an enemy. It is the way to peace and our ticket to heaven.

Let our lives be good news to others.

Oftentimes, people say that media reports too much bad news. We have discovered that they are equally interested in covering inspiring stories that are relevant to the issues of the day and the needs of our times. Good news also sells.

The best news is the poor themselves. They have shown us that they do not want to beg or steal or remain idle –that they can turn troubled and ugly slums into peaceful and beautiful communities, barren lands into fields of abundance – if they regain their dignity and their dreams for their children.

The next great news is that the young are starting to believe that there is hope in this country. Many of them are mobilizing the campuses to be in solidarity with the less privileged in their communities – to build, to care, to mentor and to learn...and to reconnect with the forgotten Filipino again. It is my great belief that change is coming that will make the future much better than what it is now.

Finally, I pray that we can all be grateful for the gift of this country.

As we advocate for change, let us not forget to count our blessings. Let us discard the mentality that everything is bad and wrong in our country, while everything is good and right abroad. Let us observe a moment of grace when we can simply thank God for this beautiful land and the great privilege of being a Filipino. With all our imperfections and problems, this is still the best spot in the planet for many of us who see this country through the eyes of hope.

This is the Gawad Kalinga dream and I am profoundly grateful to all those who have made it real. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for hoping for our country and caring for our people. May God bestow His infinite blessing on you, and to all those who are precious to you.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Tony Meloto