

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR “COUSINS” ...

THE NEXT FILIPINO SAINT?

Alfredo Florentin Verzosa (1877 – 1954)

— *Bradley Rymph*

VISITS TO SITES ASSOCIATED WITH ALFREDO VERZOSA:

Vigan, Ilocos Sur, Philippines (with José
Verzosa Baquiran iil):

February 23, 2000

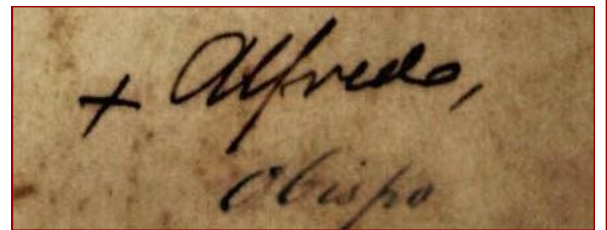
October 17–18, 2015

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Rymph.*

Bishop **Alfredo Florentin Verzosa** was born in the historic town of Vigan, Ilocos Sur, on December 9, 1877. He was the second of seven children born to Alejandro Verzosa and Michaela Florentin Verzosa. His great-grandparents were Agapito Verzosa (1792–1885) and Saturnina Bernarda (1796–?), who were also great-great-great-grandparents of José Verzosa Baquiran III. Bishop Verzosa is now being considered in a process that, once successful, would result in his becoming the third Filipino (and the first Filipino clergyman) to be declared a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.

Verzosa was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church on December 24, 1904, and served in the Diocese of Nueva Segovia, which covered his home province of Ilocos Sur. As a young priest, he worked diligently to maintain loyalty of the faithful to the Roman Catholic Church as it was challenged in the Philippines by a domestic offshoot denomination, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Philippine Independent Church), more commonly known as the Aglipayans. In the early 20th century, many Filipinos (especially those with Nationalist sympathies), and including many Roman Catholic priests, feared that the Roman Catholic Church remained too closely allied with their

Portrait, photograph, and signature of Bishop Alfredo Verzosa



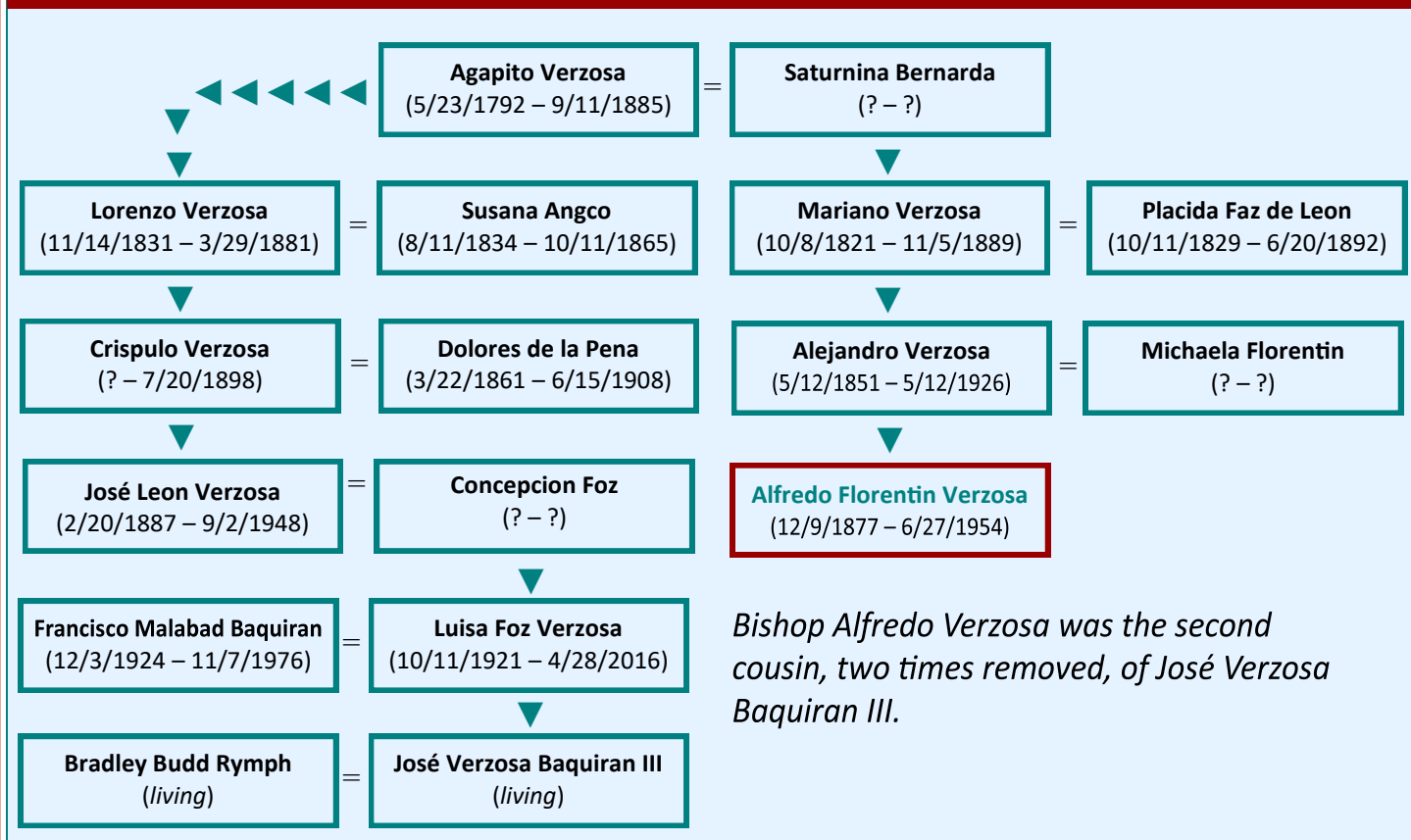
previous Spanish colonizers, and were defecting to the Aglipayans. Father Verzosa visited Catholics throughout the diocese to help persuade them not to defect. In 1909, he was sent north to the province of Ilocos Norte (at the time, a stronghold region of the Aglipayans) to advance the same goal.

At the age of 38, fewer than 12 years after being ordained a priest, Verzosa was appointed by Pope Benedict XV to be the bishop of the Diocese of Lipa, which covered the Filipino provinces of Batangas, Laguna, Quezon, Marinduque, and Mindoro on Luzon

Island. He was ordained in this position on January 20, 1917. He became the first native Filipino bishop (and second bishop ever) of this relatively new diocese, which had been created by the Roman Catholic Church in 1910. Verzosa also became only the fourth native Filipino bishop overall and the first of Ilocano heritage.

As bishop, Verzosa continued a primary initiative of his predecessor in ensuring the success of the diocese's new seminary, which had been established in 1914. Bishop Verzosa secured priests from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

HOW WE'RE RELATED



to help with administration of the seminary.

Bishop Verzosa also opened many catechetical centers in his diocese and stressed their importance to the church. In 1923, he helped found a religious institute, the Missionary Catechists of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Consistent with the hard times and destruction that faced the Philippines during World War II, several of the bishop's projects were destroyed during the war, and many priests, nuns, and parishioners were killed in the Diocese of Lipa. This included the massacre by Japanese soldiers of thousands of people in the Lipa

seminary. In response, Bishop Verzosa and his auxiliary bishop evacuated the people to a barrio far-flung from the seminary.

After the war, Bishop Verzosa worked to secure funds from the Philippine War Damage Commission and elsewhere to rebuild the damaged churches across his diocese. This included the use of personal funds that he had inherited from his family. In the spot where the seminary massacre had occurred, he built a Carmelite Monastery.

Within a few years after rebuilding much of the diocese's buildings, the Vatican asked Bishop Verzosa to retire. As explained on the website of the



The Formal Opening of the Diocesan
Process of the Cause for Beatification
and Canonization of

**BISHOP
ALFREDO FLORENTIN
VERZOSA**

Priest of Nueva Segovia,
First Filipino Bishop of Lipa and
Founder of the Missionary Catechists of the Sacred Heart

St Paul's Metropolitan Cathedral, Vigan City
January 11, 2013 at 10:00 a.m.

For inquiries:
Send your email to us at bpalfredoverzosa@yahoo.com



Grave of Bishop Verzosa inside the sanctuary of St. Paul's Metropolitan Cathedral, Vigan.





Photo of Bishop Versoza in his Diocese of Lipa in 1919, seen with Igorot children and a local priest. (Photo from University of Southern California Digital Library; posted on "Batangas History, Culture and Folklore" Facebook page, May 18, 2021.)

Missionary Catechists of the Sacred Heart, which he had helped found, "Though he administered the diocese well, he was accused of fiscal mismanagement." He officially retired on February 25, 1951, at the age of 73, and returned to his home town of Vigan.

Bishop Verzosa died three years later on June 27, 1954.

More than a half century later, several Roman Catholic Filipinos launched a campaign for the canonization of Bishop Verzosa — i.e., to have him declared a saint by the Vatican. The process, "the Cause of his Beatification and Canonization," formally launched on January 11, 2013, and Bishop Verzosa has been granted the official title "Servant of God," by the Vatican. In July 2015, Filipino media reported that the canonization process has been upgraded to *nihil obstat* (nothing stands in the way) status.

On June 28, 2017, it was announced that the Vatican's Congregation for Causes of Saints had issued a Decree of Validity regarding the documents that had been submitted in support of Bishop Verzosa's proposed canonization. Father Ericson Josue, author of a book entitled *Alfredo Verzosa, Obispo: The Life and Legacy of the Fourth Filipino Roman Catholic Bishop*, explained the significance of this decree, writing on his Facebook page:

[T]hrough the said decree, the dicastery has recognized the validity of the documents and interviews collected attesting to the life of Heroic Virtues and Fame of Sanctity of the Servant of God, Alfredo Verzosa. ... The juridical process conducted by the Special Tribunal established by the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia was also affirmed. Thus, giving the signal of the writing of the official documentation of the Cause called, Positio.

Josue also explained that it would take some time for this Positio to be written, after which it will be presented to a team of theologians for review.

TO LEARN MORE

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