**Our Lady of Kamalen**

Guam 2013

My brothers and sisters. In a few minutes we’ll be walking in procession honoring Our Lady of Kamalen–doing what people on Guam have done for over a century and a half ever since 1835, when, following some devastating earthquakes, they pledged to hold this novena and procession every year.

Again this year, as it has so often in the past, Guam gathers to honor its patroness and to ask for protection. From earthquakes, from typhoons, from super-typhoons. But let’s not forget to add another, man-made peril: from the damage that we can do to one another.

There always seems to be a serious threat lurking for the people of Guam. This is no surprise, though, because this is a vulnerable island inhabited by a vulnerable people, as you yourselves well know.

Guam’s location couldn’t be better positioned to put it in harm’s way. It’s perched close to an undersea fault; it’s right in the middle of the typhoon belt; and it’s situated in a strategic location that has made it a target for invading forces for the past 400 years. The bombs that fell in 1941 and again in 1944 weren’t the only occasions of death and destruction from the outside.

This statue, symbol of the patroness of a vulnerable island, shares in that vulnerability, as history shows. Santa Marian Kamalen has survived the shipwreck that brought the image here centuries ago, not to mention air raids, earthquakes, the destruction of the cathedral, and even a couple of thefts.

It’s as if God were saying to us: “You’ve always been vulnerable, and you always will be. But I intend to share with you your fortune, good and bad. We shall be strong together in times of prosperity, and threatened together in times of calamity.

“My mother here is a sign of my protection of you and your island. She came from the sea, as your legends have it; and like your faith, she is here to stay. Sing in her honor, pray to her, reverence her as your mother, just as she is mine. Let this statue be a pledge that whatever dangers strong winds, natural disasters, and foreign armies bring, I will belong to you and you will belong to me. Now and always.

“You may be vulnerable, but you will be survivors, thanks to my protection.”

Santa Marian Kamalen belongs to Guam, but we all belong to her. Let’s go out and celebrate that relationship, as we do proudly each year.