

Mayor Campaigns for God After Miraculous Escape

It was a year ago on Nov. 8 that one of the strongest storms in history devastated parts of the Philippines. As the hardest-hit city Tacloban slowly recovers, its mayor is speaking out for the first time about how his faith in God helps with the challenges of rebuilding a destroyed city.

As super Typhoon Haiyan slammed into eastern Philippines, Tacloban Mayor Alfred Romualdez and a few staff members were stranded at a beach front location.

"A song that I was singing throughout the time was "You are my Word. You are my God, and I lay down my life for you,'" Mayor Romualdez recounted to *CBN News* in an exclusive interview from his office in Tacloban.

Suddenly a storm surge hit the building.

Miraculous Escape

"I was asking God, 'Please give me a few minutes, even an hour to get down and to make sure my family was okay and then if it is time for me to go then that's it,'" Romualdez recalled.

Romualdez and the others punched a hole in the ceiling to escape rising water seconds before another tidal wave hit.

Meanwhile across town, at his beach house, Romualdez's wife and two children were also on the verge of being swept away by tsunami-like waves. The entire time Cristina Romualdez was reciting the whole of Psalm 91.

"I will dwell in the shelter of the most High God, I will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, you are my refuge and my fortress," she said.

The couple says it's a miracle they survived.

"When you are faced with death as I was several times during that day you completely forget everything," the mayor told *CBN News*. "I never went back to my house to check on my belongings till after five days. What was important to me were the lives of people. I got my family and I was out there saving lives."

Paying Forward With Hope

As soon as the storm passed, the mayor hit the streets, clearing debris and coordinating search and rescue operations. Over 6,000 people died that day. Romualdez says he knew he had to give people hope to help them pull through.

"People were questioning their faith and they were asking me: 'Why did God take away my children? What did they do wrong? And then I said 'Do you want to see God? Yes, then you have to die! You have to overcome death and Christianity is not focused on death, it is focused on after life.'"

A year later he's still encouraging residents of his city to draw close to God.

"The purpose in what I tell people is that when it comes to God I ask questions, but I don't question. I ask questions and I ask, 'Lord, why did this happen?' George: Have you had an answer yet? Romualdez: Yes. George: And what did He say? Romualdez: The answer clearly is that it is not a miracle that you survived, because at the end of the day you are going to die. What is a miracle here and the blessing here and the grace of God here is where are you going to go after that."

The mayor's wife, a former actress turned politician, organized several evangelistic outreaches in Tacloban, including a worship event which took place on the storm's one-year anniversary.

"Anything could happen at any minute, you could lose your life

any second, any day, so people need to realize, and I think people have realized that there's no other way you can go but rely on God and walking with God every day," she said.

It's a spiritual sentiment that runs deep in this city—as I discovered while riding Tacloban's most popular means of public transport.

"It's good to have a mayor who trusts God and encourages us to trust Him as well," Nirva Vinez, a resident of Tacloban, said. "He almost lost his life, he knows the pain we are enduring a year after the storm. We need God's help to rebuild our destroyed city."

CBN Disaster Relief

The mayor has taken a lot of heat in the last year for his government's slow response to the rebuilding efforts. But in reality, if you talk to many Taclobans, they will blame the national government in Manila.

"It's not the mayor's fault," one resident of Tacloban said. "The national government is wrongly accusing him of inaction when the blame should be on them for not doing enough to help us rebuild."

Romualdez says thanks to international aid agencies, like CBN Disaster Relief, Tacloban is slowly getting back on its feet. In the last 12 months, CBN Disaster Relief teams have built temporary homes for over 15 hundred families, restored 9 schools and helped thousands of typhoon victims with livelihood projects.

"I was very glad when I saw the teams (CBN Disaster Relief) come in because I know they work fast, and they were one of the first ones to build temporary or what we call transitional shelters and they were fast," he said.

Mayor Romualdez is a very busy man these days, trying to

rebuild and restore hope to his city. He clings to his faith and is trusting God to fulfill His divine purposes for Tacloban.

“Being more like Christ is living dangerously. We are not told that there is a disaster so we will hide. No. We are told that there are disasters to come, there are challenges to come but for us to face it, and God will be with us. Having a strong faith is the key, you cannot do it alone.”