

Fr Peyton statue sculptor Joey Velasco

MANILA, Philippines – A seven-foot bronze sculpture of Irish priest Fr. Patrick Peyton was unveiled yesterday in Attymass, Ireland as part of Peyton's year long 100th birth anniversary celebration.

Peyton, known as the Rosary priest, lived in the Philippines for a long time, promoting family recitation of the Rosary.

He died on June 3, 1992 and is now on his way to sainthood.

Filipino painter and sculptor Joey Velasco, who was chosen over other sculptors from Ireland, the United States, South America and the Philippines, made Peyton's statue.

Velasco's sculpture was erected in Peyton's birthplace in county Mayo in Attymass.

Velasco, who flew to Ireland for the event, said he felt honoured and happy to be chosen.

'Not an easy task'

Velasco admitted that working on Peyton's sculpture has been a challenging and difficult task.

Fr. Jim Phalen, Peyton's successor in the Family Rosary Crusade Movement, commissioned Velasco to do Peyton's sculpture.



Velasco said he relied on pictures and videos that were available and read Peyton's book "All for Her," a tribute to Mother Mary that served as his spiritual guide.

"(I felt) the pressure of doing it for a man who is on the road to canonization. The superior general and the leaders of the congregation had to come to my studio several times just to check on the work in progress."

"Unfortunately, none of them also saw Fr. Peyton up close when the priest was still alive. But the spirit is strongly present within them."

To fill in the blind spots, Velasco said he used his imagination and a bit of intuition in sculpting Peyton.

"Normally, I require different angles and sides. Even back view to get the likeness. So I had to use a bit of intuition and imagination to fill in the blind spots. I did five revisions to get the likeness."

"Another thing on the picture references, they are of different ages and era, so it was hard to decide which one to choose. One thing I realized though, in all his years, the passion had been strong," Velasco recounted.

He said he even consulted UP portrait artist Norman Sustiguer to help him.

What further aggravated his work was that he was ill when he did Peyton's sculpture.

"I asked for his intercession and the scheduled operation last Jan. 23 was deferred. I received healing from him, first to have enough courage and serenity, and physically the bleeding suddenly stopped," Velasco said.

Since he was 12 years old, Velasco has been sculpting in Bacolor, Pampanga and gained fame for his "Hapag ng Pag-asa" painting, a take on the Last Supper where Jesus breaks bread with street urchins.

He also wrote a book and made a video of his experience painting the "Hapag" kids. His video won the Catholic Mass Media Award (CMMA) in 2007.