

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

As the autumn days of October were moving into the colder days of November at Ava, I was moving back into the warm days of summer on the way to our daughter-house, Our Lady of the Philippines. Modern travel involves amusing relativity. I left the USA on Saturday evening and arrived at Manila early Monday morning, having lost Sunday entirely. Returning, I left Manila on Monday night, and arrived in the USA four hours earlier than I departed on the same Monday, November 22. St. Cecilia's Day got an extra ten hours this year for me.

Dom Fil, abbot of O.L.P. met me in Manila. We had lived a year and a half in Ava as rank and file friends. That was a good foundation for working together during this Visitation. We stayed overnight at the Benedictine monastery of San Beda College. Spanish monks founded this monastery 200 years or more ago. They have extensive facilities in and outside Manila—a grade school, high school, and a college offering degrees for doctors, nurses, lawyers, business, theology, etc.

Their college basketball team won the Philippine championship last season, losing not even one game. Their star was a Filipino Senior. However, an African-American Sophomore was named MVP. San Beda's team was working out at a basketball training camp in Los Angeles. This African-American asked if he could play. After practice, the coach told him to get his papers in order and offered him a place on the team, if he would like to attend San Beda College. He did not do especially well his first year because of asthma. However, he got past that, and led the team in charging and rallying as a sophomore. The Filipinos say they are basketball crazy.

The 7,000 islands were mostly connected by boat before WWII, but now flying is the way to go, at least for the middle class. There is still a lot of very real poverty, but the people and their nation is moving forward. There is still a deep devotion among the Filipinos. The feast of Christ the King attracted almost 300 people to OLP for the monk's two-hour liturgy, completed with a long procession with the Blessed Sacrament to usher the old liturgical year out.

Dom Fil and I flew from Manila to Iloilo, across the bay from OLP's island province (state) of Guimaras. Outrigger ferryboats are still the only way to get there from Iloilo City. Bro. Sonny, a senior monk who pictures his Chinese ancestry with twinkling eyes, and a wispy gray mustache and beard, escorted and then drove us home to OLP.

OLP is almost 40 years old now. In 1972, six monks began life there in a few nipa huts (woven

grass and bamboo on stilts) on a grassy scrubland. By 1990, there were around 20 monks, some still living in nipa huts, but there were some permanent buildings made from their own home-made earthy blocks-abbot's hut, refectory and kitchen, common room, infirmary and a nicely designed bamboo chapel. Today the abbey has a guesthouse, gift shop, wings of private rooms, a large food manufactory, and a magnificent, spacious monastic church, built with those homemade earthy blocks.

For many years, the rustic facilities and the isolated island locations were handicaps against their self-support. Now the combination of a large food manufactory, better transportation and marketing, have turned their bakery into a steady producer.

The tropical climate means a lot of open doorways, windows, and passages. One evening during Vespers, I was struck by the pleasant chirping of some type of wild canary outside both choir sides. When the monks paused, the birds quieted. The birds began to sing again, when the monks took up their chant again.

After Vespers as you file from the church along the open way to the refectory, you get full advantage of the sweeping western view of the bay far away and below. From my bench in the refectory, I could watch the glorious glowing color changes as the sun sank through the clouds into the sea.

Lest this sounds too much like Paradise Regained, the day ends with Compline in complete darkness, facing the red glow of the sanctuary lamp. Then there is a sting on your arm or neck, then a buzz right at your ear. Then there is annoying flitting in front of your face. I finally put up my hood and tucked my hands into my sleeves during Compline trying to outfox the mosquitoes.

When Dom Fil and I met, he casually said, "Oh, by the way, you can give us our yearly retreat the last five days you are here. Nice of him to inform me several days before the retreat was to begin. However, all is well that ends well. All the monks gathered to say goodbye and they all seemed so happy to see me go.

Visitation

Abraham received a visit from three men, who in a puzzling way kept turning from three to one, and from angels to the Lord God. God told him that He had come to fulfill His covenant promise

that Abraham would have a son and be the father of many nations.

Later God visited Jacob in a dream in which he saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. God told him that He was renewing the covenant with him, which God had made with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac.

God visited Moses in a burning bush on Mt. Sinai. The Lord God told him that He remembered His covenant promises and would deliver the tribes of Israel from slavery and bring them to the land of promise. After a little persuasion, Moses headed toward Egypt with his Midianite wife and two sons. God visited him again at night as if to kill him. Moses' wife circumcised their two sons, saying, "Now you are a spouse of blood to me." Abraham had received circumcision as a sign of God's covenant with him, but Moses neglected that sign. Death was the penalty for breaking a covenant.

King David wanted to build a house for God. The Lord God had responded through the prophet Nathan that, on the contrary, God would build the House of David, and there would always be a son of David on his throne. God made a personal covenant with David. Yet God visited David again later through Nathan, saying, "You are the man." God forgave David's sin of adultery, but the child of the broken covenant must die.

The mills of God grind slowly, but very fine. Nine hundred years passed between David and the next covenant visitation.

In the fullness of time, the angel Gabriel visited Mary of Nazareth and told her that she would bear a son, who would sit on the throne of his father David. As to how this could be, the Holy Spirit would come upon her.

Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth. At the sound of her greeting, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and her son leaped in her womb. Zachary, his father, praised God Who had visited His people and redeemed them.

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice addressed Him, "You are My Beloved Son. With You I am well pleased." God confirmed Jesus' human understanding of His mission as the Lamb of sacrifice taking the sins of the world on Himself; the Suffering Servant through Whom God would make a covenant with the nations.

At the Last Supper, Our Lord gave his apostles His Blood of the New Covenant, and He

comforted them that He would not leave them orphans. He would ask the Father to send them another Paraclete, the Spirit of truth to be with them and in them.

On Easter Sunday evening, Our Risen Lord visited His disciples in the upper room, assuring them of His abiding covenant love. He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven.

Jesus had promised the apostles that when the Spirit of truth came upon them, The Holy Spirit would bear witness to Jesus, and they would bear witness. The Risen Christ told them to wait in the city for the promise of the Father. They would be given Power from on high. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fulfilled Jesus' New Covenant promise.

The Glorified Christ visited Saul on the road to Damascus to effect his conversion from darkness to light. Christ told Ananias to go to Saul, because Jesus had told Saul how much he must suffer for Him, and Saul is praying. Ananias told Saul to arise and be baptized, and he would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Glorified Christ visited John in exile on Patmos. He dictated through John letters to each of seven churches with a personal message from the Mediator of the new covenant, yet Christ ended each letter saying, "Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

As we look at the visitations of the Old Testament, we see there is always some relation to covenant. In the visitations of the New Testament, another reality is added-the gift of the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation, the visitation to Elizabeth, the Resurrection, Pentecost, Saul's conversion, John's book of Revelation.

Even with the graces of the old covenant, God's chosen people could not recognize the time of their visitation. So God's divine Son became the Son of Man, Who fulfilled completely our human side of covenant union with God. He then sent His Holy Spirit to enlighten, purify and strengthen us in our weakness and woundedness, so that we might be able live out our personal and community new covenant union with God-by following Christ ever more fully in our Christian and monastic conversion.

In the Sacred Heart,

Fr Cyprian