

Dear Friends and Visitors

The Lord be with you—

From mid-September until mid-October, I traveled to our daughter house, Our Lady of the Philippines. Here are some of the letters I faxed to our Ava monks.

September 29, 2009

Dear Fr. Alberic and Bros:

Greetings from cool and rainy Guimaras. The weather has been like Ireland-rain and stop, rain and stop-except for the strong blasts of wind here. The side effects of the typhoon, which struck Luzon and Manila, remind us of their disaster.

It has been 16 years since I was here, so the church, guesthouse and food manufacturing (F.M.) buildings are all new for me. It is heartening to see the increase on the material level, but even more satisfying to see the growth on their community level-not an increase in numbers, but a personal maturing and growth as brother monks, living our Trappist-Cistercian way of following Christ together.

After a week and more at OLP, getting acquainted with old-timers and the new men, I am sitting in the airport at Cebu, waiting for the connecting flight to the city, General Santos, in Mindanao. They told me that Gen San is a mostly Catholic city, so I am wearing a black clerical shirt and a Roman collar. The rebels have a habit of abducting a foreigner and asking ransom. If I am nabbed, I will tell them that I am a monk with no money and not worth ransom...trusting that you will tell them the same.

The Trappistines should meet me at the airport for the drive to Matutum. This will be the first time I have seen their convent and community, though of course I know Fr. Agie, their OLP chaplain. I met Mother Giovanna at the General Chapter. (She said, "I am on a diet, but now that I am back in Italy with our pasta, the diet will have to wait till later.")

The Filipino bishops have dedicated the Philippines to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. There is a year long observance involved in the dedication.

News came later that armed outlaws kidnapped the 80-year-old Irish-Columbian father, who had been Fr. Alberic's hometown pastor. We must continue to pray for him.

When the foundresses of Our Lady of Matutum asked the meaning of Matutum, they were told "Blazing Fire"- (appropriate for an extinct volcano.) Later the bishop told them that it meant "Fervent." Either way Mother Giovanna chose Pentecost as their patronal feast day.

Sr. Joseph (Josie) from Iloila (OLP territory) was the first to join 15 years ago and persevere. She said that she was afraid in the beginning to come down here to Mindanao, because the area was a battleground for the insurgents. However, after the Trappistines came, the Muslims declared that they respected the religious, so now it is a peaceful area. The valley and foothill opposite the monastery were not inhabited when the nuns arrived. Now there are people living in houses and huts. There is a school and Pentecostal church also. The people feel secure here near the monastery.

The community is perhaps ¼ Italian, ¾ Filipinas and 1 Portuguese sister...counting professes, juniors, and novices.

My respect for mother Giovanna and her nuns has grown. They have a good spirit, a very fine choir, are hard-working and seem to have a good formation program. Just before I left Ava, I found an ad for Scott Hahn's new book on Pope Benedict's theology and spirituality, Covenant and Communion. The nuns have done a DVD course on covenant in the Bible, produced by Scott Hahn, and have ordered his book (as I also have.)

Back at OLP-the second and third typhoons merged and again poured more rain and damage on northern Luzon and Manila. All in all, it was perhaps worse than Hurricane Katrina.

Today is the first time that we have blue skies and white clouds here-as mild as Matutum for three weeks.

Dom Fil asked for a friendly/pastoral visit this year-before next year's visitation. He asked for some conferences on covenant, so we had some evening sessions. The monks ask quite good questions.

Yesterday afternoon we had a conventual chapter meeting. First on the agenda was the voting for the first vows of Bro. Kevin John. He has completed his year of postulancy and two years as a novice. The monks gave their approval. He will make profession tomorrow. His parents, who are peasant farmers, will be here. It will be a double celebration: temporary profession here and the canonization of the Spanish brother, Raphael Arnaiz Baron at St. Peter's in Rome. Br. Joseph, 72, is the oldest monk at OLP and is an oblate. He takes St. Raphael as his patron. I told

him that Ava has an 87 year old oblate, Wally Kendrick, who is also diabetic. He has taken Raphael also as his patron saint. The Filipino Bro. Raphael here has done well at the FM (Food Manufacturing Plant). Last month they sold as much as they once sold in a whole year.

In the Sacred Heart,

Fr Cyprian