

Dear Friends,

It was a feast for the eyes! Before me was an exhilarating and awe-inspiring sight. Having just participated in the religious fervor and pageantry of the Feast of the Santo Nino of Cebu during my trip to the Philippines, me and my hosts, the Medinas, spent the following day relaxing. It was a holiday in Cebu, so we went on a getaway with their extended family to Barili Falls in the southern part of the island. The water, rushing down 321 feet over the cliff into a large natural pool, was far more than magnificent. I could hardly let my eyes wander from this incredible scene. All about us were walls of lush, tropical vegetation that provided a natural coziness that soothed the soul. The pool of cool water was beckoning me.

I jumped into the refreshing pond and was surprised that my sizeable body mass did not displace all the water from the pond! I wasn't able to swim for very long because the water was a little too cool, but it sure was refreshing.

Shortly after exiting the pool, the food started to appear. It seemed that every time I looked up, something new and appetizing presented itself. We had hanging rice, pork, ribs, chicken, tilapia, potatoes and a variety of fruits and sauces. We all stood around the table like a pack of wolves going after the kill! All of this made for a very enjoyable day savoring the beauty of the Philippines and the friendliness of its people.

The next few days included the mandatory pilgrimage to some of Cebu's main attractions - the malls! We did a little shopping, and lots more eating. I found myself eating things like fresh lumpia, crispy pata, and halo-halo! Speaking of eating, I think I got a taste of most of the local cuisine. This became a kind of ongoing joke as people kept placing different things before me telling me, "here, you need to try this!" I was even given a T-shirt that listed all the different Philippino foods. We kept vowing to put a check mark on the T-shirt next to the name of each food that I ate. One thing I didn't eat? Balut. Balut is an egg with a one-day-old chick inside. Guess I would never make it as host of the TV program "Bizarre Foods!"

Fortunately, I was able to get a taste of Cebu's beaches too. I spent a couple of days enjoying the tropical setting of white sand and palm trees. Too bad I didn't come back with a tropical tan to be the envy of all of you who were suffering from cold winter weather! I suppose I used too much sunscreen.

The last couple of days in the Philippines were marked by a trip to a farm in the mountains. This was another day of enjoyable vistas. On the last day, I celebrated a Mass for the deceased in a local cemetery, completed a little more shopping, and bid farewell to my new-found friends.

All in all, it was an amazing trip and a beautiful cultural experience. The Gospel this weekend presents us with the Lord performing the miracle of the great catch of fish. The large catch represents the universality of Jesus' message - that people's from all nations will be drawn by the Lord. Certainly, it was a blessing to become acquainted with these people of Southeast Asia, who have been enriched by the proclamation of the Gospel by the early missionaries. It was my privilege to see the unique expression of faith of such loving people. Pit Senyor!

Fr. Paul