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Dear Mom and Dad,

*I'm planning to go back to Kidapawan later today, and will stop at the internet café tomorrow, so I can send this out. In fact, I've recently decided that I will try to consider each Monday as a "day off". I've told the people not to expect daily Mass on Monday afternoons, so if I need or want to go to Kidapawan, I don't have to worry about hurrying back. I imagine that I would usually go on Sunday evening and spend the night there, returning sometime on Monday. This time, I'm going this afternoon because the NFL playoff games are being shown on TV (tape delay) tonight. So, I'll spend tonight there at the Bishop's house and return to Columbio tomorrow.*

*The Jubilee Celebration in Kidapawan was OK, but would have been much better if it hadn't been raining all day. The event called for 24 hours of activities, from 8:00am on Friday to 8:00am on Saturday. Each parish of the diocese set up a tent in the Kidapawan City Plaza, where all the activities took place, and there were over 20,000 people there. Unfortunately, at noon on Friday, it started to rain; it was never a huge downpour, but it was steady for twelve straight hours, just enough to make it uncomfortable. Huddled into our Columbio tent were just over 300 people. During the day on Friday, there were "Jubilympics Games" for the youth (basketball for the boys, volleyball for the girls). I took the opportunity to accompany Dante, one of the students who lives with me and the one I taught to drive, to the LTO (Land Transportation Office) to get his permanent driver's license. We had gone in October and got his temporary permit and were to return a month later for the permanent one, but that was right when the Vitara went for a swim, so we weren't able to get back until now.*

*I learned something about bureaucracy here. We approached the desk of the license administrator, and while he was making small talk with us, he was also filling out a form with lots of checkmarks. I thought that he was doing other work. When he finished, he told me that the cost for the license was 500 pesos if Dante takes the test, and 800 pesos if he doesn't. That's when I realized that the form he was filling up with checkmarks was actually Dante's test! For an extra 300 pesos (pocketed by him of course), Dante could get his license without a test. When I hesitated, he made clear to me that if Dante took the test, "he might not pass." How would I know if he really passed or not? I paid the 800 pesos (about \$20).*

*Later, I skipped out to the internet café, and then spent the rest of the afternoon watching the basketball games, which were in a indoor gym. At 6:00pm there was an outdoor Mass presided by the bishop. I had planned to concelebrate, but didn't know where the priests were gathering until it was too late, so I stayed with the crowd. Luckily, I had thought to bring along a plastic rain poncho, so I stayed relatively dry. After Mass was dinner. Each of the parishes did its own cooking in the tents they had set up, so I joined the Columbio group.*

*I was thinking about going to the Bishop's house to sleep for a few hours, but then I figured that if my people were stuck out here, I might as well be with them. I had told everyone before that this was not an event for young children, but one couple brought their baby anyway, and sure enough, as the evening went on, he was getting pretty miserable in the cold, damp weather. I told them to take him into the Vitara, where it was at least a little warmer. One of the activities during the night was an awarding of certificates for participation in the travelling Jubilee Cross. Over the past three years, the Cross has been taken to every GKK in every*

*parish of the diocese (there are over 700 GKKs). Columbio's turn came before I arrived here, but as current pastor, I was to receive the certificate.*

*One of the parish team members made it a point to tell me several times during the week that I would be the one to accept it. "Ok," I said, "No problem." But I couldn't figure out why she kept reminding me. When the time came for the awarding, Columbio was the third parish called, but the pastors of the first two were not present, so I was actually the first one to approach the stage and receive the certificate. I was wearing my jeans, muddy shoes, blue rain poncho and ball cap, and I went up, shook hands, took the certificate and left the stage. Then I watched as all the other certificates and awards were given out. Every one of the recipients was formally dressed! All the men, including priests, wore "Barong Tagalog", which is the most formal dress shirt they have in the Philippines. The women were in long, fancy gowns. I guess anytime there is an "award ceremony" here, it is a formal event. This was the unspoken message that my parish team member was trying to get across with her reminders: make sure you bring some formal clothes. But she never said so directly, and the message didn't get through. Then throughout the night, there were songs and prayers, and testimonials from different individuals about what effect the presence of the Jubilee Cross had within their GKK.*

*I managed about a half an hour of sleep under the tent: the people had cleared a bench for me to lay down on, while they themselves lay on the ground. Even though it was raining, I found it better to wander around and try to watch what was going on at the stage, rather than stay in the tent which was so crowded with people laying all over the ground that you couldn't walk from one place to another without stepping on someone. Anytime I went to stand near the stage, someone from our tent would come up with a chair and insist that I sit down. Finally there was dawn Mass at 5:00 AM, again presided by the bishop, and this time I concelebrated.*

*By the way, the Bishop himself stayed the whole night through, wandering around in the rain, greeting people, giving blessings, etc. I was pretty impressed by that, because it would have been easy enough for him to go home for at least a few hours of rest. After Mass there was a procession from the City Plaza to the Cathedral, where the Jubilee Cross was enthroned. I decided to skip the procession and drove to the bishop's house to check on mail and drop off some correspondence. Then I went back to the Plaza, picked up the parish team members, and after a little shopping, it was back to Columbio...and to bed!*

*I mentioned before about the young man (Jake) who wants to become a priest. I took him to Kidapawan last week to take the entrance exam to the College Seminary in Davao. Unfortunately, he didn't pass the exam. The vocation director told him that he should go to College on his own for two years, and then he can try again. Jake took it pretty philosophically, saying, "Well, I guess it's just not my time right now." So he plans to enroll in College, probably in Iligan, where his aunt lives, and then see how it goes. I'll keep in touch with him as I can; in fact, I will probably end up helping him with his college tuition, since he has two older brothers in college already and his parents won't be able to afford a third.*

*Jake's experience with the entrance exam has brought me to another decision, though. The test was in English, which is natural, since all college courses are taught in English. But Jake said that he didn't understand half the questions. Since he is near the top of his high school class, that leads me to conclude that the students are finishing high school here without an adequate knowledge of English (this, although even in high school, the classes themselves are supposed to be taught in English). That puts the students from Columbio at a tremendous disadvantage when they try to enter college, especially the better colleges which require an entrance exam. So, I've decided to begin a "Remedial English" class for 3rd and 4th year high school students. I haven't worked out the mechanics yet, but just from talking to people about the idea, it seems that there will a lot of interest. I'll keep you posted.*

*Oh, one more language misadventure. On February 6th, we will celebrate the "Kasalan ng Bayan" which means "Community Wedding". It's a mass validation of those in "irregular unions" (common-law, married in*

*front of a judge or minister of another denomination). So, after a Pre-Cana seminar, they have a chance to have their marriages validated in the Catholic Church. So far, I've interviewed 13 couples who wish to participate. Yesterday (Sunday) during the announcement time at Mass in the barrio of Maligaya, I told the people that I had some reminders about this event. But instead of saying "KASALAN ng Bayan" (community wedding), I said "KASALANAN ng Bayan", which means "community SIN"! The people were laughing so hard that I immediately realized what I had said. So I followed up by saying, "Ok, the community wedding will take place on February 6th; the community sin will continue to take place every day." OK, I'll close for now. I imagine that I will come back to Kidapawan again next week, to catch the Super Bowl, which should be televised live on Monday morning here. So, I'll check in again then. Love you and miss you! Love,*



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