

## FR. STEVE BAUMBUSCH ,PIME

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May 20, 2000

Dear Mom and Dad,

*Happy Mother's Day! I know I'm a little late, but this is the first chance I've had to write in a while. In fact, I'm not sure just when I will be getting to Kidapawan ...could be next Monday (the 22nd), but we are having a Youth Leadership Seminar here at the parish from Monday to Wednesday, so I don't know if I will be able to slip out. If not, I definitely have to go to Kidapawan on the 29th in order to enroll the college students I'm sponsoring. So, when you read this, you'll know when I managed to get there.*

*As I mentioned to you before, we had our parish fiesta on May 15. It was good, even if we got rained on in the afternoon. The day began with a procession through the town, carrying the statue of San Isidro Labrador. San Isidro was a farmer, and is the patron saint of farmers and all simple working people. So that's pretty appropriate for Columbio. Besides the statue, the parade consisted of marching bands from the high school and elementary school (when I say marching bands, it actually means drums and xylophones) and floats from the different districts of the parish, carrying their candidates for Mr. and Mrs. San Isidro (more on that later). Actually, I didn't participate in the procession: with the usual "filipino time", the 7:00 AM procession began to form at about 7:45, and that was just the moment when the bishop arrived, so I welcomed and entertained him while waiting for the time of the Mass.*

*The Bishop celebrated Mass, while I directed the choir. We sang many of the songs that Mark had taught them during his visit here, and they did a great job. The bishop, who is a Cebuano speaker, made me feel good as he stumbled over some Tagalog words...nice to know I'm not the only one! Anyway, he's a wonderful shepherd, very down to earth and comfortable with the people. We also celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation. The bishop's style is to do that separately, after the Mass; which is a good idea, especially with our small chapel. There were 150 confirmands, so together with their sponsors, they filled the whole church.*

*Then we had lunch, and afterward an exhibition basketball game: clergy of the Diocese vs. the men of the Marriage Enrichment Seminar group (something like the Marriage Encounter movement). Since the priests brought plenty of seminarians for their side, I played with the MES group. I should say I tried to play. The basketball court is made of cement and doubles as a "dryer" for rice and corn (i.e. the harvested grain is spread out to dry in the sun). The cement is really smooth and slippery. In fact, when it rains heavily, the little kids strip down and go sliding around on the court. Anyway, I had a really hard time keeping my feet, even though the rain didn't come til later. But it was fun anyhow, and our side won!*

*Then we were ready to start the "Coronation" of the King and Queen of the Fiesta, also to take place on the basketball court and the concrete stage alongside it. And that's when it began to rain. It looked like maybe it would just drizzle for a while, but as it got progressively heavier, we decided to move the Coronation into the church. I think I mentioned to you last time about this custom, which is common during fiesta time. The parish is made up of 4 "districts" and each one chose a couple as its candidate for King and Queen. Then it is up to the district to solicit donations in the name of its candidate. The one who comes up with the most is the winner, while the others are runners-up. In other cases, the candidates might be little kids or teenagers, but the planning committee this year opted for couples. It is a good fundraising method, and there was enough raised to cover all the expenses of the fiesta, as well as a 10,000 peso (about \$250) contribution*

*toward the new church. That might not sound like a lot to us, but for the people here, it is considered highly successful.*

*Then the Coronation is a very formal event. All the candidates are dressed in their most formal gowns and "barong Tagalog", and they process in accompanied by the honor guard of the high school ROTC. There are sashes, bouquets, scepters, and crowns presented to them. And of course, like any gathering here, there is a full agenda of "intermission numbers": songs and dances performed by different groups or individuals, as well as speeches, inspirational messages, etc.*

*So all in all it was a fun, if tiring, day. This past week, I asked the parish team for an evaluation of the fiesta, and almost all the comments were positive, with a few suggestions for future improvements. I asked how the attendance compared to previous years and they told me that it was up, both for the Mass and for the Coronation. So that's encouraging.*

*Now that the fiesta is over, I hope to get started working again on the new church. The Cooperative has removed most of the bodega, so we should be able to begin preparing the ground. I'll have to get the Planning Committee together again to finalize the design and then have it approved by the bishop. I was told not to expect much construction to take place during the months of August to October, since that is the rainy season. But the weather has been unusual ever since I got here. Last year during those months there was not a huge amount of rain. On the other hand, we are supposed to be in the dry season right now, and it rains a few times a week. So go figure. If we can at least have the ground and supplies ready by the end of the rainy season, I'll be happy. My dream is to have the church finished by the time of the next fiesta, but it remains to be seen how realistic that is.*

*I guess that's about all for now. I'm well and safe: I know you are following the news about the troubles in the Philippines, but here in Columbio things have been peaceful. Love and miss you both! Love,*



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