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Hi everyone!

*Since I'll be going to Kidapawan next week for the monthly Clergy meeting as well as the monthly Mass with my scholars, I thought I would write while I have a little spare time.*

*In my last letter, I described to you the case of the young girl in Lam-alis, whose family requested a blessing because they felt she was being afflicted by an engkanto, or evil spirit. The following week, I received a message from the village of Maligaya, asking me to come and bless a young man who was "acting crazy". This time the situation was a bit more dramatic. When I arrived, a large crowd of people was gathered near the man's house. I spoke to his mother, who said that it would be good to have several men go in with me, because sometimes the young man became aggressive.*

*When I entered the house, he (Arthur) was sitting on the floor with his arms wrapped around his wife (they are newly married), crying and mumbling incoherently. The people told him that Father was here, and he turned his attention to me. I said, "Arthur, is it OK if we pray together?" He shook his head no, looked around at all the people crowding the room, and began to get agitated. "You don't have to worry, Arthur," I said. "All of these people are your friends." He shook his head again and stood up and began to walk towards the door. Two or three men held him back, and then it was necessary for two more to join them in order to keep him still. He wasn't really violent, in the sense that he was taking swings or trying to hurt anyone; he just wanted to leave.*

*After a couple of minutes I said, "Look, if my presence here is causing this agitation, it's better if I step outside for a while." So I went into the next room. About five minutes later, the people told, "He's calm now, Father. Please come in and give him a blessing." So once again I asked him if it was OK to pray together, and once again he shook his head no. I said, "Arthur, I want to pray for you and ask the Lord to give you peace of mind." Again he stood up and began to move toward the door and the men restrained him. Through all of this, he was absolutely silent: no shouting or yelling, just a determination to leave. The men said, "Father, bless him now, while we're holding him." So I said a prayer of blessing, asking the Lord to send peace upon Arthur and all in the house, and I sprinkled him and the room with holy water. Immediately he calmed down and sat on the floor.*

*Then I went outside and talked with his mother. She told me that all of this began about three days before. At around midnight, Arthur woke up screaming and remained unresponsive and agitated; since that time, he had not slept or eaten. She said that it was a very sudden thing; before that time, he was perfectly normal. While we were talking, one of the men came out of the house and told us that Arthur was sleeping now. I said, "Well, if he's been three days without sleep, I imagine he would be tired."*

*I asked if he was a heavy drinker or whether he took drugs. They told me no on the drugs, and said that he drinks sometimes, but not heavily, and not at all at the time these problems began. One man said that Arthur has definitely been over-tired: he's been working long hours in the fields and not taking much rest or nourishment. I told his mother, "I don't think we're dealing with an engkanto or evil spirit here. There could be some physical reason for his behavior. For example, I'm no doctor, but I've heard of cases in which wild fluctuations in blood sugar cause symptoms like this. If possible, you should have him checked by a doctor."*

*She tried to give me a donation for the blessing, and I told her to keep it and use for the visit to the doctor.*

*On the way back to the rectory, I talked to the parish team members who had accompanied me. They said, "This is a new experience for you, isn't it Father?" "You got that right," I replied, "and it's interesting to see the cultural differences in response to something like this. Here, the first thing people think of is an engkanto, affliction by an evil spirit. In my culture, that's the LAST thing we would think of (if at all), after all other possible explanations were excluded. But then, for us, it's easy to go to a doctor, to have all kinds of tests taken. That's next to impossible here.*

*I asked them, "What did Fr. Bruno (my predecessor) do in situations like this?" One of them replied, "We didn't have any cases during the time of Fr. Bruno." "Wait a minute," I said, "six years he was here, and not one 'engkanto case', and I've had two in the last week?" "That's right, Father. And before Fr. Bruno, during the time of Fr. Peter, I can only think of one case. I guess you're just lucky."*

*A couple of days later, when Fr. Peter was here in Columbio, I talked to him about the situation. He said that probably there were some cases during the Fr. Bruno's time, and maybe the parish team just didn't know about them. At any rate, he is familiar with the phenomenon, both from his time at Columbio and in his present work with the Tribal Filipinos. He said that my suggestion to take the man to a doctor was natural from our point of view, but not very realistic. Even if they were able to go to one of the nearby cities to visit a doctor, it is unlikely that there would be the diagnostic resources needed. Maybe in Manila such resources would be available, but going there would be out of the question for them. Instead, he said, people in this kind of situation often consult an "Abularyo" or natural healer.*

*From what I understand, the practice of an Abularyo ranges from knowledge of herbal medicines to more esoteric kinds of "faith-healing". Often they will diagnose a physical or mental problem as stemming from bad relations within a family or among neighbors, and work to effect reconciliation between the parties as the first step of the "cure". Fr. Peter said that there is definitely a religious component to their activity, and usually they receive the "gift of healing" following some personal crisis or tragedy of their own. Later, I talked again with the parish team about the Abularyos. They absolutely believe in their effectiveness, even if they don't understand how it all works. "All I can tell you, Father, is that the person usually gets better after seeing the Abularyo."*

*I was trying to make a comparison in my mind with the "Brujos" that I encountered in Mexico. Often these are the richest people in the village, because they charge a fee for removing a curse or more often for placing a curse on one's enemies. Apparently the Abularyos are a bit different. There is no standard fee for their service, although they do accept donations of cash or food. And, it seems that their work is concentrated on the positive side of healing, rather than the placing of curses. To be honest, I don't really know what to think about all of this. My culturally-biased secular mentality leads me to dismiss it as mere superstition. Yet, there's certainly some basis to believe in the effectiveness of natural or herbal medicine, and about the rest, who knows?*

*As I told the parish team, I don't believe in ghosts or the "White Lady" (a particular phantom that is believed to haunt different areas) or the fear of dying in your sleep if you have a nightmare while alone in the house. Those things I do consider superstitions. But as for the Abularyos, it seems that they perform a valuable service and with tangible results. It's a little like last Sunday's Gospel in which the disciples tried to stop a man from driving out evil spirits in the name of Jesus, because he was not of their company. "Don't try to stop him," Jesus said. "Anyone who is not against us, is with us." So if the Abularyos are doing good, and helping those in need (who, realistically, have no other recourse), who am I to say them nay?*

*On to other news, I've told you several times about the SLOW progress of any kind of project, and that situation continues. We're still in the process of extending the existing cement Dryer/Basketball" court. We finally had a delivery of a few loads of filling material a couple of weeks ago. Then, nothing for two weeks.*

*Last Monday the delivery began again, and brought the total up to 15 loads, out of the 30 loads needed. I was hoping against hope that they would continue on Tuesday and finish the job, but no go. Now the municipal equipment is busy with other projects, and it's anybody's guess when the remaining material will be delivered.*

*The frustrating thing is that this should a one or two day job, and once it's done it should be only about a week's work to extend the dryer, for which I have already bought the cement and rolled steel bars; but we've already been waiting more than two months just to get the filling material here. Patience!*

*The same is true of the generator repair. This past week I thought the saga was coming to an end, and I even made plans to go to Kidapawan and buy the new freezer. The motor is working fine (although a muffler coupling was cannibalized a couple of years ago for another purpose and will have to be replaced). We had sent the generator itself to an electrician in Kidapawan, who worked on it, and declared it ready to go. But when everything was reassembled here in Columbio for a test-run, there was no current being generated. Of course, no one here knows what the problem is, nor is there any testing equipment, so we will have to get an electrician to come here and look at it on-site. Naturally, I cancelled my plan to go to Kidapawan for the freezer. Patience!*

*Ok, I'll close for now. My best to all.*

*Love,*



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