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Dear Mom and Dad,

I plan to go to Kidapawan within the next couple of days (I need to buy altar wine), so I thought I would write a line or two. I'll try to remember to take the disk with me, and if the internet is cooperating on the Bishop's computer, I will send this via e-mail. If not, I'll drop in the snail-mail box. Things continue to go well here. In fact, today I'm pretty excited. I told you that I was planning to begin daily Mass here in Columbio. I wanted to do it, even if very few people would show up. Well, today was the first one, and over 100 people came! [See P.S. at end of this letter]. And eighty per cent of them were teenagers! It was really great. A lot of participation, singing, etc: better than the Sunday Mass here! Today being a Wednesday might have something to do with it, because Wednesday is special to those who have a devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, a popular devotion here in the Philippines. We'll have to see if the initial enthusiasm continues, but for now, I couldn't be happier.

Earlier this week, we had an outing/Day of Recollection for the volunteer catechists of the parish. We went to a beach house in General Santos City, about 3 hours away. When I say beach house, I don't mean anything fancy. It's just a two story wooden house, with one large room upstairs. But it was nice to get away and to be near the sea. We had a couple of Sisters come along, and they gave a conference to the catechists, and we had Mass at a gazebo on the beach. Other than that, we just relaxed, swam, sang songs, etc.

At night, everyone slept on the floor of the upstairs room. I managed for a couple of hours, but for some reason they left the light on all night, and I couldn't stay asleep. So I got up and walked along the beach for awhile, then tried sleeping in the gazebo, but it was a little cold. So, I ended up in my car, which was comfortable enough. The next morning, some people asked me why I had moved, and I told them that the light was keeping me awake. They said, "Yeah, the light was bothering me too." I thought they had left it on for a reason! If I had known there was no reason, I would have just turned it off. Live and learn.

Speaking of the car, I got my first ding in the Vitara last week. I was heading up to a village in the mountains, and right at the crest of a hill there was a truck stopped on the side of the road (actually ON the road). It didn't look like he was stuck, but rather just waiting for someone or something. Anyway, it seemed like there was enough room to get around him, and there would have been, except just as I reached the top of the hill, the road fell away on the right side. So I had to turn sharply back to the left to avoid losing the right wheels into a deep ditch. I had almost passed the truck, but ended up clipping the left rear fender of my car on it. So there's a small dent and some orange paint (the color of the truck) there. The next time I go to Davao, I will see about getting the dent pulled out. I also have some scratches on the hood. Kids can't resist playing on and around the car while I'm saying Mass in the villages, and I'm pretty sure that's how the scratches got there. I should be able to have them rubbed out (the scratches, not the kids) in Davao.

That's about all for now. Like I said, I hope to get this out via e-mail before the end of the week. Another reason that I'm hoping the internet is working is that I haven't yet heard the score of the Buckeyes' opening game. There's a sports report every hour on Voice of America (shortwave), but they didn't give the score on Monday morning (Sunday evening there; I figured the game would be over by then), and then I went on that outing for two days, and didn't take the shortwave radio with me. If I can get to the internet, I can read the Dispatch reports on the game.

Ok, take care. I love you and miss you! Love,



P.S.

One update in regard to the daily Mass: I mentioned that on the first day there were over 100 people, mostly students. That number held for a few days; then the teachers at the high school decided that Mass attendance would be a good accompaniment to the course they have on "Values", and strongly encouraged the students to attend. Now there are more than 200 coming every day! There's no place to put them! Some are sitting on the floor, some standing along the walls, some outside. At first, I had planned to have simple daily Masses, with no homilies, but instead just a moment of silence after the Gospel. But then I said to myself, "you can't waste this opportunity of having so many young people here every day." So I've been preaching a short homily. Then, today the attendance at the Sunday Mass was also up by about 50-75 people. I'm sure it's an overflow effect from the daily Mass, because I saw several young people who have been attending daily, but whom I haven't seen on Sunday before. Again, we had people standing outside today, because all the seats were taken. So, God is good!

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