

# **PHILIPPINES**

**Priest visiting priests**

*Jesus Caritas*

October/November 2018

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## Sharing life

In this report you find daily notes of Fr. Klaus Beurle, German diocesan priest who was visiting priests, bishops and cardinals in the Philippines from October 23 to November 15, 2018. He is a learning traveller depicting observations of daily life along with people in the streets of Manila, on the roads in northern and southern Philippines. He was eager to meet people of all walks of the society so as to get a vivid understanding of history, culture and society and the values of the ever-open minded population of the Filipino society.

Dr. Klaus Beurle was invited by Filipino priests and encouraged by the Asian Responsible Fr. Arthur Charles from Pakistan of the Priests Fraternity *Jesus Caritas* inspired by *Charles de Foucauld* to visit priests and to share with them human and spiritual experiences, questions and visions. Charles de Foucauld, a French noble who first tried to make career as soldier and as researcher and who had lost his faith until he rediscovered the meaning of Christian faith. From his conversion on he wanted to live like Jesus in Nazareth. This led him to live among people who are farthest away from Jesus. He ended among the Tuareg in the Sahara where he was killed in 1916 among people to whom he became brother to all, *universal brother*. The Priests Fraternity, one of numerous associations or communities

inspired by Brother Charles, emphasizes simplicity of life, adoration, sharing of personal life experiences.

The booklet invites readers to follow Fr. Klaus on his way to some places of the fascinating country with its 7101 islands and a population of 107 million people. Observations, conversations, discussions and reflections are touching basic issues of the Society and of the Catholic Church.

Photos made by: Klaus Beurle

# Jesus Caritas - Priests visiting priests

JC PVP

*Philippines from 23th Oct to 15th Nov 2018*

Personal notes by Fr. Klaus Beurle, Jesus Caritas

## Tuesday, 23th October 2018

Safely I am arriving with the Arabic Etihad at Ninoy Aquino Airport Manila, NANA. Remembering the cheaper grab taxi I am taking one of these social taxis reaching my 3 Star **Mansion Hotel Octagon in Malate** 1632 M. Adriatico Road. I discovered that cheap hotel when I was put on the road after arriving in Manila for the Month of Nazareth last July, no fraternity brother to be found at the airport who could guide me to the then mysterious Mt. Peace in Baguio. Later Pakistani Frs. Arthur, our Asian Responsible, and Nazar joint me by good luck of Fr. Edo on our search of the “holy mountain” of Nazareth. All staff of Mansion Octagon recognize me as I do recognize them, all smiling in the typical relaxing Filipino way. It was almost midnight. I had then a sound and healthy sleep to get fresh for meeting my Filipino brothers here and there.

## Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> October

6 a.m.: After physical exercise and Prayer of the Sun, Holy Mass in the already familiar Malate Church looked after by Irish and later by Filipino **Columban Fathers**. I went as usual after Mass to the celebrant, this time Fr. **Michael Martin, 72**, a jolly and warm-hearted fellow priest, who offered us three stranded brothers last July a generous dinner with tasty “medicine”. He was blessing after Mass individually a good number of believers in a Filipino way. Many poor people among them. I can feel Martin’s kind heart towards the poor. He explains to me: “The poor people are good people struggling so hard for their survival... But also see in front of us, two rich ladies, both Opus Dei, belonging to our parish, coming daily to Mass... they buy big buildings in the area so that they can influence the people with their orthodox faith...” He is smiling...

Leaving the historic **Malate Church** near the Manila Bay, founded in 1588 by Spanish Augustinian missionaries, nowadays known as Church of *Our Lady of Remedies*, I am contemplating daily life in the surrounding of the Malate Church: child beggars at large, job seeking youths, well dressed job holders... A grown-up youngster is following me decently asking: *Sir, please could you help me?* I turn around, realizing the worries and sadness in his eyes of this young fellow... *I came from the province*

*looking for a job but I was robbed and I lost everything even my ID... Should I believe him? How? I did believe him... Mark got 50 pennies by begging, needs 500 pesos to go back to his province Nieve Ecija.*

**Mark, 30**, told me his life story: He was a half orphan when 6 years old, has 2 sisters, primary school education, broken teeth, as eldest son looking after his mother, searching a job while dreaming of being married one day...

I asked Mark to help me in some of my practical works and needs, buying small things, calling crab taxi, loading my handy... He did everything most carefully and in an intelligent way. He wanted to wait until I am back from my tour with Fr. Silas.

**Fr. Silas Murmu**, 35, ord. in 2007, Santali priest from Bangladesh, came to see me. He is studying in ICLA, interested in Jesus Caritas. He is in his fourth year at ICLA, the *Institute of Consecrated Life in Asia*, submitted last week his paper on *“Ecumenism and Ethics”*. We are going around in ancient **Manila Intramuros**, reviewing Filipino history at the monument of nationalist martyr José Rizal (1861-1896), praying in the monumental Cathedral of Manila, rich of paintings and sculptures depicting historic events, highlighting the visit of Pope John II. to the Cathedral in 1983. *“We have to study hard, every day we have to submit a paper on difficult basic issues.”* Fr. Silas went back to ICLA.



## Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October

It is such a pleasure to get up early at 5 a.m. praising our Creator, greeting the people around on my way to the Malate Church, praying at the Bay of Manila the ***Prayer of the Sun***, the traditional Indian prayer taught by Fr. Sebastian Painadath S.J., Sameeksha Ashram in Kalady, Kerala, followed by the ***Prayer of Abandonment*** in the spirit of Charles de Foucauld.

As usual after Mass I go to the sacristy greeting the celebrating priest. This time it is Irish Columban **Fr. John Leydon** in his 60<sup>th</sup>, who impressed me by his theology brilliant short homily. We had an exciting discussion about what is good theology. John was drawn by René Girard and in particular by James Alison, *The joy of being wrong* and *Raising Abel*. By concluding Fr. John explained to me his commitment to the group *Theology and Ecology*. They have a center outside of Manila. John is willing to take me there after returning from Baguio...

Returning to my Mansion I am again talking with street boys and girls, with job seeking youth, with baby carrying women – they all experience **inhumane poverty** with a tough struggle of survival in a country with a population of app. 107 million people where around 80% are earning not more than **100 pesos per day** whereas around 20%

families have more than one car... and with many priests having good cars not seldom even with a driver...

I am getting ready for my trip to Baguio... again for visiting priests and to experience a bit the life of the people.

In a relaxing non-stop 6 hours trip with Victoria Liner from Pasay to Baguio, to the capital of the Highland Cordilleras, I am reaching there around 8 p.m. From the bus stand I am taking a taxi straight to **Mt. Peace**, venue of our still spiritually alive Month of Nazareth. **Justin**, 25, the spontaneously appointed secretary at the Asian JC Month of Nazareth, opens the gate and I am at home. We embrace one another, happily. His parents and their numerous dogs, included the handicapped one, come to greet me. Thanks Fr. Sanny, they knew that I am coming today... super communication!

## Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> October

Evening Mass at the Cathedral of Baguio with high speed Eucharistic celebration and high speed homily in *Taglish* – half English, half Tagalog. After Mass I saw the celebrant, he took short time for me telling me that he, **Fr. Maron**, is the Rector of the Bishop's House of Baguio surprised

when I told him that I got an appointment with the Bishop next morning.

Among the crowd at Mass, again a great number of young people – unlike at home in Germany or in the West in general. Although the Philippines being a highly capitalized market society with mere materia-istic outlook and attractions, it seems to me that young people have not lost **the sense of the Divine**, the mystery of human life, **the Transcendent**.

### **Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> October**

Appointment with **Bishop Victor** at 10.45 a.m., warm welcome, well informed on Jesus Caritas after Fr. Arthur had offered him *OPEN HANDS* last July. I was invited to concelebrate at a priestly ordination anniversary Mass for three diocesan priests followed by lunch. It was good and strange at the time. From 3 anniversary priests only one is present – one is serving in Australia, one is being sick. **Only Fr. John**, 52, was present. Celebration went on in full swing and happy festivity as it was a great event for smany priests... When I talked at lunch with very friendly Bishop Victor about his homily on the growth of the fruits on the fig trees as follow up of the conversion of the hardminded Jews, I asked why he did not mention the

precondition of conversion until we can talk about growth of the fruits, the Bishop replied: *People may not understand it...*

After high standard lunch with all sorts of drinks and long discussions I had agreed with the Bishop to visit sick priests living in the Bishop's House. It got a revelation in itself: Among two priests living in the well taken off center for sick or retired priests of the Diocese of Baguio one was deaf and the other one was suffering of cancer. **Fr. Matthias**, 42, who had just undergone his first chemo, was willing to receive me. Our encounter turned out into high light of the day. Matthias knows well Jesus Caritas, is familiar with some of our brothers, belonging to the same ethnic group as great Bishop Francis Claver S.J. Matthias spoke openly about his sickness, his way of taking the plan of the Providence etc. Thus, we had a touching sharing of our life experiences. Only when some ladies of his previous parish came to bring some gifts to Fr. Matthias I felt the need of leaving Matthias...

Since I was rather exhausted after five hours with Bishop and priests I was looking for a place of my adoration... Instead I was drawn into a Sunday meeting of the **Charismatic Movement** in the Bishop's House. After listening, half sleeping to a 90 minutes homily of a lay person preaching about the gift of speaking in tongues described in the Acts of Apostles, I felt relaxed and found my own way of listening to the Lord. What the preacher

said was theologically sound through and through. It was almost night when I returned with thanksgiving to Mount Peace.

## **Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> October**

Day of the Lord: First Mass at the CICM Chapel, lovely wooden, homely shelter of the Lord. **Fr. Constancio Milanes**, 80, is celebrating Eucharist in admirably contemplative way. He was missionary in Latin America. He recognized me from my last visit in July 18.

Then I wanted to join the students in the Saint Louis University Chapel. Lively songs by the Messiah choir. **Fr. John Gala**, 39, from Sulawesi in Indonesia, was the celebrant. We had a long sharing after Mass with a cup of tea. The Indonesian Bishop sent him for additional studies – in psychology. He obeyed. He could not ask enough questions about JC, could not believe that we as Fraternity have no own buildings, no head quarter etc. He is leaving home in 3 months. Before that I shall write to him....

## **Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> October**

Returning by Victory Liner from Baguio to Manila-Cubao, a 6-hours trip while enjoying the beauty of nature: first the high mountains, the bus driving down to the valley with its plenty rice fields until slowly reaching the globalized world of factory and trade center of the 20 million capital of Manila.

## **Tuesday, 30<sup>st</sup> October**

### **Desert Day**

A full day in silence, walking without fixed destination... It helps to become calm and to forget my worries... I went to the Bay of Manila, walked along the water ending finally in Intramuros to take a long time for Adoration in the cool, air-condition Adoration Chapel of the Cathedral.

## **Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> October**

Visiting brother and friend Msgr. Allen Aganon in St. Andrew Cathedral in Parañaque: I know Allen since 1983 when he was in San Carlos Seminary...now he is Msgr.

**Allen Aganon**, 62, being Vicar General of the Diocese of Parañaque now for one year, Rector of the Bishop' House etc...

I followed Manila born Allen from the Seminary to Las Pinas, Pasay and again San Carlos... He spent 5 years in the mission in Peru - *It was quite difficult, weather, culture, people...* Allen visited me also in Bangladesh...I met his lovely mother who passed away two years ago, 92 years old. She gave Allen that warmth of heart which he kept unto the present. And his voice was so calm and human when he read the Gospel today at the grandiose diocesan *Concluding Celebration of the Year of Clergy and Consecrated Life*. Bishop **Jesse Mercado** DD was the main celebrant of the event. The vital Bishop was just returning from a truly exhausting pilgrimage to Italy (Como, Assisi, Padua, Florence, Rom) with *sic!* 49 priests of his diocese, Allen among them. The Bishop announced the Year of the Youth highlighting the importance of young people finding their place in the Church.

More or less the whole day I spent with Allen... for lunch also with Frs. Eric and Roder, and a quite alert, some good question asking seminarian - Hansel (not Gretel!). Siesta after lunch was a relaxing moment. The hour in the Adoration Chapel was again an intense time.

## Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> November, All Saints

Allen had arranged for me his car to reach easily Lipa in Batangas where Cardinal Rosales lives since his retirement. Appointment, fixed by Fr. Sanny, 11 a.m. with **Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales**, 86. He is a mostly welcoming person, very open to priests and eager to offer places and opportunities for priests to meet. He is one of the great pioneers and motivators of Jesus Caritas in the Philippines.

I was surprised that we were seven priests around the lunch table who all had been invited by the Cardinal. Our sharing was wonderful, remembering many events we had together like the Month of Nazareth in Cameroon Highland in Malaysia or encounters in San Carlos Seminary. We referred to our familiar issue of the missionary call of diocesan priests following the vision of Pope John Paul II. expressed in *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1999. Cardinal Rosales was very enthusiastic (more than me) by three weeks with the “*incorrupt heart relics of St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina*” in the Philippines. The relics had been exposed in Manila, Batangas and Cebu from 05. to 26. October 2018. The Cardinal is sure that many Filipinos/as – estimated 5 million – are deeply inspired by and attached to St. Padre Pio.



Cardinal Rosales, in spite of his limitations to travel, came to see our brother priests in Manila who had come from abroad for the Month of Nazareth in Baguio last July. He is still now as all the years before a brother priest and a Cardinal where priests love to meet and share their lives.

## **Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, All Souls**

Mass again in Malate Church. **Fr. Chris**, from Mindanao, ord. 2001, returning from Taiwan after 5 years of Columban missionary work, in his homily: *Jesus death is the hope for all who are dying*. I was telling Jesus all the names of my nearest ones who had died, beginning with my parents, with Jean Goss ending with Arnold from Bangladesh, 42, my student dying of cancer in Toronto, and Auwi, 92, from Ueberlingen, friend for 60 years...

Lunch with Fr. Silas at the fraternity of ***Little Sisters of Jesus*** in Mandaluyong, 21 Alchan St. – what a lively sharing for more than 3 hours with Srs. Celcilia (Phil), Ana Rita (Italy), Maria (Vietnam) and Sina (Pakistan).

Many historical events in world politics and in CdF fraternities history came to our mind and numerous common friends spoke from our hearts... such as Jean and Hildegard Goss Mayr, Fr. Bene Tudud who died in

plane accident after leaving Baguio, Fr. Jonny who was killed right after our JC Asian Week in Cagayan de Oro in 1986 (?), and amongst us Cardinal Rosales, great friend of the Little Sisters, Frs. Allen, Sanny, Celsi, Bishop Edwin de la Penas of Marawi, now in Iligan etc. My question regarding coming JC World Assembly in Cebu showed the L.Srs. equally uninformed. We agreed that Filipino JC brothers do have some times an IT resistance virus by never replying to mails or messages...

Evening I invited myself to dinner with great missionaries Frs. John Leydon and Michael Martin. We enjoyed our sharing about mission today in China, about courageous Pope Francis, clear stand of Cardinal Tagle towards Filipino clericalism and about formation of Columban lay missionaries. I was really impressed understanding newly that Church is based on relationship among human beings...

## **Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> November**

Visiting **ICLA** - *Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia*, Culliat, Quezon City

Bengali Fr. **Silas Murmu**, Dinajpur Diosece and Fr. **Noren Joseph Baidya**, Khulna Diocese studying there in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Noren still remembers my written questions given

at the diaconate retreat which I was facilitating 1999 in the Diang Ashram near Chittagong... Both are well aware of the various aspects of the Church in the Philippines compared to the Church in Bangladesh: *“The Mass participation of the Filipino community is much more lively and active than in Bangladesh... The priests are highly respected by the Filipino society, they seem to stand on a platform high over the ordinary faithful... The gap of rich and poor with a decreasing middle class society is felt everywhere... more than in Bangladesh where the poor are more benefitted from the economic progress of the country... The rich Filipinos/as keep far distance to the poor, even in the Church... Some priests obviously prefer to relate rather to the upper middle class than to the disadvantaged faithful of their communities... Unlike Bangladesh ordinary people do not get easy access to a priest whereas in our country anyone can approach priests without any hesitation or bowing down deeply...”*

We had open minded sharing at lunch with the ICLA Claretian staff, priests mostly from India. **Fr. John CF** from Bangalore explained to me the outstanding educational works of the Claretians in Philippines and elsewhere.

After lunch with the Bengali priests I went on with my mission of visiting priests. After one hour drive I landed in the crowded Barangays of **Fr. Edo Coroza**'s parish of San Juan Nepomuceno in Malibay, Pasay... Such a crowd of people with endless tricycles pushing through the narrow

roads... The Church was closed, nobody knows where to find Fr. Edo. To relax among those lovely people who do not know anything to reply to my queries I stand before an equally crowded hair dresser with almost no place to sit. The boss however was, glad to welcome me and offered immediately a seat and prompt service. He cut my hair in a manner no German Friseur could do it better... The price was merely 60 pesos including nose and ear care!!!

I went out of the hair dresser seeking again Fr. Edo... I went his Church along calling again where is Fr. Edo? Suddenly he stood in front of me: *I am Fr. Edo!*

## **Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> November**

Appointment by kindness of Fr. Sanny de Claro with His Eminence **Luis Antonio “Chito” Gokim Cardinal Tagle**, Archbishop of Manila at 9 a.m. at his residence, 121 Archbishop’s St., Intramuros. The Cardinal came to see me with German time: exactly 9 a.m. when church bell was ringing. I brought to him greetings of Jesus Caritas Asia, of Walter Cardinal Kasper and of the Little Sisters of Tre Fontane, Rome offering to the Cardinal OPEN HANDS, Jesus Caritas Asia and a small album of the famous German pilgrim Church, the Bavarian Wieskirche.

I was from the beginning surprised by his fresh and spontaneous spirit knowing exactly when we met last time (in July this year) and why I came to take his time. He spoke to me for one full hour as we were friends since long time. I knew Tagle was an outstanding personality – but now I understood that Tagle is an extraordinary gift of the Filipino Church entrusted by the Lord’s providence to the Universal Church. His memory, his way of analyzing ecclesial and political situation and challenges and his deep theological thinking and vision are so outstanding that I was truly overwhelmed by meeting such a wonderful person in the name of Jesus Caritas. Whether we shared our views on Pope Francis or the clergy of the Philippines or on Padre Pio or the Polish or European Churches or on President Duterte and his performances or on the peculiarities, unique gifts or limitations of the Filipina Church, on the painful gap between rich and poor in the Philippines including the Church I felt to talk vis a vis of a prophet reading and explaining deeply the signs of the time, a brilliant theologian and a committed and compassionate pastor of his Filipino flock.



In the garden of oldest church in Manila



Street business in Manila



With David in his garden of bio diversity



With Tony and John in Remase in Mindanao





Handcapped, homeless living in the streets



With Cardinal Luis Tagle in Manila



Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales in the Center



Entrance to a model garden of bio diversity



Evening Mass in pilgrim church in Baclaran



The dog listens to the Gospel in Remase, Mindanao

After the God given encounter with the Cardinal of Manila who touched my heart I felt the need to digest by pausing many of the words of the Cardinal. When the songs of the nearby San Augustin Church came to my ears I joined the Sunday crowd at Mass in the eldest church of the Philippines as I was told later when I followed a guided tour through the ancient St. Augustin Monastery.

**John Lersweg**, 20, an Augustinian voluntary tourist guide, explained so well what was before not clearly in my mind: Trying to understand the culture and history of the Filipino society and church John pointed out the Chinese influence with the first Chinese town in Binondo, 10<sup>th</sup> century, the long pre-Spanish time of the islands under Islamic Sultanate of Brunei until the arrival of the Spaniards with Magellan in Cebu in 1521 which was the beginning of the Christian era of the Philippines. The impressive **San Augustin Church** in Intramuros, built in Spanish Baroque style in 1582, is the eldest church in the Philippines. With weekly hundreds of wedding ceremonies San Augustin is the wedding capital of the Philippines. Due to its construction by pure stone out of adobe, volcanic tuff and eye white the church has a mystical meaning for the Filipinos and Filipinas as a symbol of virginity.

With the Cardinal's striking words in mind and the Filipino cultural history in heart I moved on by grab taxi to be for Sunday lunch at the table of JC brother priest

**Fr. Sanny de Claro** in Sto. Niño Parish in Pandacan. Without Sanny my JC priest visiting priest program would not have taken place. He was the only one who with standard IT messenger communication enabled me to visit day after day up to now more than 25 priests. I am grateful to him in the name of JC Asia. It shows again our Foucauld principle: *One is enough; if one does what all should do things will be done...*

I could feel while staying and dining with Fr. Sanny that he is very close to his coworkers, to the laity at home and in the parish. He named his Parish Centre “*Nazareth Home*”. According to the tradition the Child Jesus was hidden in the fields for 300 years. People are coming from far to pray to the hidden Jesu in Sto. Nino Parish in Pandacan. Fr. Sanny also founded in cooperation with the then Archbishop Rosales of Manila a *Home of Nazareth* in Ermita when he was parish priest in Ermita. It was made as a homely place for priests who had to stay for short time in Manila. Sanny’s fraternity of priests is meeting regularly every month for adoration and sharing of lives.

**Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> November**

Leaving Manila for Mindanao curious for whom I would meet there. Fr. Tony Llanes several times requested to

prepare an informal program of JC Priest visiting priests. My emails and sms remained unanswered. I was convinced that Tony in the mountains of Tagum diocese was affected by the Filipino priest **IT virus**: Do not open, do not reply – there may be a virus int the air... or there is just no WI-FI available...

After shaky Philippines Airline flight PR 1812 from Manila to Davao I arrived safely in the capital of the southern island. From my arrival my eyes were filled with beauty of the natural scene of the region where controversial President Duterte started for his presidential career.

I was looking around outside the airport for someone to pick me up... in vain. But I had no address, no place where I could go. Should I take a hotel? I had only one name: **Archbishop Capalla**. The taxi driver seemed embarrassed. I told him to bring me to the cathedral... He replied: *Which cathedral? There are many cathedrals...* After discussing in Cebuano language which is said to be an easier language the Tagalog with several taxi drivers and police officers he started the trip... After 20 km and almost one hour I got nervous... *Why do you bring me to another city? I told to bring me to Davao...* He could neither understand nor reply a single word in English... only Cebuano which I had not yet began to learn... Suddenly he stopped at the door of a Seminary... I was wondering... He told the guard Archbishop Capalla... The



guard checked me... he opened the door. And immediately I stood face to face with the welcoming Rtd. Archbishop of Danao Fernando Capalla.

After a long exchange of views and experiences realizing how many friends we have in common (Francis D' Sa, Pune, Msgr. Markus Solo SVD, Rome, ...) he brought me to the nearby St. Francis Xavier College Seminary, where I was warmly welcomed by Rector **Fr. Orlando Angelia**, 46, who will allow me to join 3 days the vibrant seminarian life of *XACOSE* on the *holy mountain* of Davao. The holy mountain comprises more than a dozen of religious congregations and institutions of religious and priestly formation. During these days I could meet many priests in Mindanao observing that clergy mentality is quite different from Manila clergy mentality. Christians of the big island in the south of the Philippines with a rather poor population and with the regional Church being organized and structured by basic Christian Ecclesial Communities, **BEC/GKK**. The majority of the priests are close to these basic communities with most by poor Catholics.

## Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> October to Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October

Enjoying the hospitality of San Francis Xavier Seminary, I could meet priests in the Seminary or somewhere around. One of the brother priests I met belongs to the staff of the Seminary, **Msgr. Edgar Rodriguez**, 76, one of the first five diocesan priests of the Archdiocese, active member of Jesus Caritas. He is maintaining daily the hour of adoration. I realize the impact of his adoration by his contemplative way of being a parish priest and of saying Mass. At breakfast and night dinner we had lively, unforgettable sharings and discussions with the staff, with Rector **Fr. Orlanda Angelia**, Dean of Academics **Fr. Urban Pardillo**, Main Spiritual Director **Msgr. Nelson Lucas** and others... **Deacon Ramos** was assigned to assist and guide me what he did in a kind, most attentive and spiritually alert way. When as Dean of Studies Ramos was on duty, pre-deaconal seminarian **Chris** replaced him, also in a lovely way.

On Tuesday I went to see the nearby study center of the Benedictines of San Anselm. **Fr. Edgar Friedman OSB**, 78, from Muensterschwarzach near Wuerzburg. I met P. Edgar first in 2001 when he was Prior of the Benedictine Community in Digos. Affected by a stroke, his health has unfortunately deteriorated badly in the meantime. Being of the same age as me, I do not know how to thank our Lord for the good health I am enjoying

for so many years. When all Benedictine Abbots had gathered last week in **Digos** in connection with the inauguration and blessing of the long-planned OSB Retreat Center in Digos the Abbot Michael of **Muensterschwarzach** decided that Fr. Edgar *will leave the Philippines for good* coming February – painful enough for my friend after giving his life for the Philippines. Since Edgar is no longer able to travel by his own he will be accompanied by Filipino OSB Brother Moses who had been trained a nurse...

On Wednesday I was taken down the mountain by Deacon Ramos to visit **Fr. Max** in his San Isidor Labrador Parish. He, class mate of Tony Llanes, was before Rector of the XACOSE Seminary, taking health leave before being recently appointed to the Labrador Parish. I was told that, in contrast to the Seminary, the church has an own **Adoration Chapel**. So, I went there, since I like to spend my hour not just in some chapel or church but, whenever possible in an adoration chapel. It makes for me a difference in listening to Jesus when I look at him in the form of a bread... I found adoration chapels in the Cathedral in Manila and Bagiuo, in the Malate Church and in four parishes. In Tony Llanes new parish with the irritating name *Mary Mediatrix of all Graces* he has still some work to do: his predecessor kept the Holy Sacrament locked up, due to security reasons, in a small room near the sacristy...

On Thursday, we went first to the Bishop's House in Davao to meet the busy Archbishop at breakfast – but in vain, he had gone to Manila for only one day. Instead, I shared breakfast with **Msgr. Julias Rodulfo** who was before Rector of XACOSE now being the President of the prestigious Holy Cross College in Davao City. After his sabbatical year in New Zealand Fr. Julias is much concerned with what kind of formation should be given to seminarians nowadays. He is aware that unconsciously the mind of the young generation is infiltrated by basic values of the IT age which are difficult to be addressed and dealt with. Friendly words had been exchanged with **Msgr. Jimmy Gamboa**, the Chancellor and Rector of the Bishop's House, where 3 veteran German Volkswagen can be seen.

After breakfast Ramos brought me to the ferry coast since I wanted to spend my November **Desert Day** at the lonely beach of San Marina. It was good to breathe with the breeze of the sea and to relax and to pray without any schedule so as to ponder on the many enriching and inspiring sharing with priests in the context of their individual life stories. The Magnificat and the Jesus Prayer together with the Prayer of Abandonment came again and again into my mind.

## Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> November

It was finally the day to meet my dearest Mindanao brother Fr. Tony Llanes who made it to find me in spite of day long communication break due to the famous Filipino IT virus... I met Tony, now 57, in 1981 when he was still a seminarian in XACOSE Seminary.

By waiting for Tony I had an extraordinary intense talk with **Judge Jesus Quitian**, 78, of same age with me. A brilliant spirit with large international experiences so with China, Baltic countries etc., being member of the Board of XACOSE he explained to me the importance of abolishing the death penalty in 2001 in the Philippines, the great role of women in the Filipina Church and the way how the GKK with their many lay ministers – himself being one of the them - are functioning. “The way how we are bringing holy communion and distributing in the remote basic communities is not understood by the West...”

At the same table I met one of the many extraordinary women of Mindanao: **Ms. Cora U. Mesiona**, in her 40<sup>th</sup>, science teacher in XASCORE Seminary. Before she was teaching science in New York for 11 years. She had been hired together with other Filipinas by a US government teachers association to teach in interracial schools in NY

with black and white students where American teachers are not willing to teach!! Cora – a real Filipina missionary!

Before the Board of Counsellors was ready to meet President of the Board, **Archbishop Romulo Valles DD**, the President also of the CBOP, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines appeared. I heard good things about him. We had a short but warm-hearted conversation. The Archbishop, coming from Tagum Diocese, was classmate of Tony Llanes who was standing at my side while talking with Archbishop Romulo.

Then, along with Tony we went off to the GKKs, the famous **Christian Communities** of Mindanao.

### **Friday 9<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October**

It was a short but wonderful time to “go around” with Tony from one priest to the other and from one community to the next one and above all to visit some of the **basic Christian communities, the GKK** chapel communities – Eucharistic communities based upon chapels built by poor Christians themselves. I was not impressed by all priests but certainly **Fr. Maximo Bahinding** from Sto. Nino Parish made impression on me since denounced the lavish life style of his predecessor and made his parish a community with and for the poor.

As member of Jesus Caritas, he commented: “*For most of the priests our daily adoration is seen as a waste of time....*”

**Tony** Llanes has to face the same challenge – and he does it bravely and calmly. His predecessor priest was for 6 years neglecting the poor in the chapel communities, instead he was totally linked up with the upper middle class of his parish: a rich lady offered big donations to the parish allowing her and other ladies to run the parish... with fatal effects regarding basic pastoral needs of the majority of the parish who are poor people.

The newly installed Bishop of Tagum had 6 weeks ago in a **clerical coup** assigned all priests of his diocese to new parishes or new pastoral duties. The partly resistance of the priests remained under control of the Bishop. It seems that Nuncio had done a good job... I met the open-minded Nuncio with Frs. Arthur and Nawaz in July this year on our delayed route to Month of Nazareth Mt. Peace (due to IT virus among our JC brother priests) in the Parish of Fr. Edo Corazon in Malay, Pasay. Fr. Tony Llanes, our JC advocate of the GKK, had just moved to his new parish: the **Mary Mediatrix of all Graces Parish in Panabo City**, Tagum Diocese. The name of the parish is as questionable as the pastoral practices up to now. Tony will give his best to do what is needed so as to form a parish center around the Eucharistic altar and to make space for an adoration chapel.

Saturday evening, my last evening in Mindanao, we concelebrated pre-Sunday evening Mass in the **GKK San Roque**. It was a REAL spiritual and pastoral experience! Joyful songs of the communities accompanied by guitar and flute, with dogs, many children and youth, with parents and elderly people among around 120 Catholics. Muslims are peacefully living with them in the nearby villages. Tony's homily was a lively Scripture based dialogue with the people. I was invited at the end of the Mass to say a few words what I did by telling the community how beautiful small things are in the eyes of Jesus. The Eucharist was followed by dinner prepared by the GKK at the doors of the chapel. It was indeed the **climax of my liturgical experiences** during almost 3 weeks in the Philippines!

## **Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> November**

Sunday Morning Mass with the parishioners in the simple main church of **Tony's 19 GKK Parish**.

Tony's lively dialogue homily with the people on the widow giving just their last few coins, touching songs at the Eucharistic celebration, dedicated lay ministers, babies, young and old people - all together a truly Eucharistic family spirit. Unending queues for individual



blessings at the end of the Mass. It was my third Sunday Mass in the Philippines after Baguio and Manila – truly the most touching Eucharistic experience. Return to Manila at 11:20 hrs. by PR flight 2428.

Evening I was moving through horrible traffic jams to the Baclaran Church, so often visited in the years before. I would not like to leave the Philippines without revisiting the **National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help**. What a crowd of youths at Mass at 7 p.m.! 600 to 700 young people at evening Mass! Many of them continuously touching either the Cross of our Lord or the statue of Mother Mary.... An Indian Redemptorist Father was saying Mass, his homily was simple and short. What happened in our Western societies and churches that practically almost none of the young generation goes for Sunday Mass to a church? I was sharing this question with many priests...

It helped me to overcome **my shock** when I realized after returning to Manila that my **account was blocked** at the ATM, my mastercard, maybe I forgot the PIN number of my VISA Card... I tried in five ATM, in vain... I could not withdraw any money any more having only 100 Pesos left in my money bag... What to do? I borrowed 200 Pesos in my Arirang Mansion to pay the taxi bringing me back from the Mother of Perpetual Help... I did not sleep well...

## Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> November

At night I could not stop of thinking how to solve the problem... phoning to Germany, asking for new PIN etc., finally the idea came to my night mind or the Lord told me: Send a message to Fr. Sanny de Claro, to my efficient program and date *maker*, telling him my story and asking him if I could borrow some money from him so as to survive until departing on 15<sup>th</sup> November... Few minutes later **Fr. Sanny** replied on sms being himself outside of the city.

## Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> November

Manila: *I shall send you my assistant, Mr. Manny, to give you the needed amount.* OMG... I could not believe that even in money affairs the Lord is doing miracles through people who are his servants... THANKS GOD!

In order to calm down I had long hours of prayer and adoration and did extended reporting writings...

**Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> November**

**Irish Columban Fr. John Leydon**, 69, had promised two weeks ago in spite of his busy diary to take me today to his project which is the result of his life experience to be converted through ecology. He took me in his simple car almost two hours away from Manila to Cavite, to the parish in Imus Diocese where John was assigned in the 2018s, a time of horrible violence with unending killings, terror of leftists and of the military. In his midlife crisis John went on sabbatical leave for one year to search for the meaning of life, for **the origin of creation**. In California he met priests and researchers who questioned our traditional Western understanding of ecology and ratio-based cosmology. Later, Providence brought him back to his previous parish where he started his **Center for Ecozoic Living and Learning**. A tremendous experience for me to see practically what a new understanding of Ecology, exactly in line of Pope Francis *Laudato si*, can bring forth: *a cell of native architecture, zero-waste management, permaculture, eco-spirituality, biodiversity, organic farming*. I seemed to live in a world of an ecological paradise where nature, not human planning is shaping the lives of the humans... John Leydon has described the vision of a Future Earth Culture in his Personal Version, revised 2002 of ***The New Story of Creation***.

I met a really admirable priest. We could not end our sharing on today's issues concerning church society, priestly ministries, marketing economy, youths, sicknesses, visions...

## **Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> November**

Last encounter and get-together with friends is with the **Little Brothers of Jesus** coming from Marikina to see me in Malate: **Bernard**, 87, French who came to 1977 from Vietnam to the Philippines, the hardships of his life can be seen in his face and lacking teeth like the poor but ever smiling and relaxed... and **Manning**, the Filipino Little Brother of Jesus who is in his 40<sup>th</sup>, full of life and eager to share news about brothers, sisters and priests of the Foucauld fraternities all over the world. Little Brothers are in Asia in the *Philippines, in Vietnam, Korea, India and Japan*; no more in Pakistan. Bernard is convinced that the Church in the Philippines has to play an important role in Asia for spreading Christianity and building up Christian communities. Bernard is reminding us of **Pope Paul VI.**'s call to the Church in the Philippines **to become a missionary Church** when he was visiting Asia. The Church in Vietnam is seen as a vital and creative

Church, but also in China unknown movements and witnesses of faith are coming to the surface.

We three went together to the **Blessed Charles de Foucauld Center** in Ermita, established in 2013 by Fr. Sanny de Claro with support of Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales. *“In the middle of the busy capital of the Philippines, its strategic location offers a refuge for priests from the provinces who are visiting the city for a short period of time – like foreign embassy interviews, a day or two of private recollection, or a stroll in the historic city.”* Parish Assistant Jesse Vallo kindly introduced us. He also told us how much our brother Fr. Jacob Gomes from Bangladesh lived and struggled for his thesis in this parish.

On my last day we contemplated, the two Little Brothers and myself, the mystery of Christ’s presence among us in the adoration chapel of the Ermita Church, *Our Lady of Guidance, National Shrine of Nuestra Sra. de Guia*, previous Parish of Fr. Sanny de Claro.

## **Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> November**

It is such a great moment at the beginning of my days in Manila between 5 or 6 a.m. to walk through the streets of Malate, the city awaking from the night sleep with few

cars, jeepneys or tricycles in the streets being greeted by street beggars, the night job holders and security guards in their smart uniforms. That's the mostly lovely moment of the day when a city is taking up the days life.

My farewell Mass at the Malate Church was blessed with a last encounter with an extraordinary priest after his celebration: Columban Filipino **Fr. Roy Rocamora**, 47, ord. in 2001, who was working for 17 years in China. The Gospel was about Jesus' talking about the *Kingdom of God within us*. Often, he had experienced this among Chinese who do not know anything about the Church. Roy is happy about the Church's new attitude towards China. Pope Francis overcame the status quo where the Government and the Church will remain enemies forever... The vital priest gave me his blessings for my journey.

**Returning to cold Germany** by Etihad flight EY 423. Thanks God for the past three weeks. During three weeks, I met day after day friendly people, with mostly smiling faces and an easy to eye-to-eye communication, I never met angry people or people making negative or aggressive remarks on interhuman level. People of such an open attitude I probably shall miss in Germany. Filipinos are people **who suffered a lot but still know how to smile** and to rely in their personal lives on the One who is for them their Savior and Redeemer. The Kingdom is in the Philippines present and yet far away as

it is everywhere. “When it comes to social justice we have still a long way to go,” John Leydon said. Roy Rocamora added today: “Yes, the people are smiling but we have still to struggle for freedom: the poor are **slaves of money** and its machinery to put down the majority of the people...”

## Conclusion

**After three weeks** of meeting and visiting people of all walks of the Filipino society while travelling from central Luzon with Manila City to northern La Union with Baguio City in the center and to southern Mindanao with Davao City in the center, I take unforgettable moments of meeting people of the Philippines home to Germany. About my encounter, discussions and life sharing with many priests, many outstanding ones, with several Bishops and with two Cardinals I have daily reported in my diary. Through them but not less through people on the streets in the cities and in rural areas, I got an impression of **the culture of the Filipinos and Filipinas** which helped me to more or less understand the extraordinary kindness and patience of the 107 million inhabitants of the paradise of 6000 islands in the Pacific Ocean. I also got an idea of the striking popular devotional piety of the mainly Catholic population, no less among old and young people. Inhabitants before the Spanish colonizers came to Cebu in 1521 are found in the northern area of the aboriginals, the indigenous population and in the deep South in Mindanao cultural traditions are found from the long period when the inhabitants were ruled by Muslims. The culture of the majority is the outcome of as well dramatic as tragic colonial history. The Spaniards ruled and shaped mind



and heart of the population from 1521 onwards until Japanese, in a rude way, took over the country until the Americans at the end of World War II began to unfold their power and influence. The **3-times-colonized population** learned through centuries to adjust, to resist, to suffer and to survive – in the way what they are now: people smiling and open to all, loyal and faithful to their major religion capable to survive even as the majority is still very poor. At the end of my journey, I am more than before convinced that we **can learn a lot** from the people of the Philippines.



