

## Saint Bernard Novitiate in Tacloban ♦ Philippines



*“..and then once you’ve finished the high altar, you know, like the one at St. John Lateran in Rome, we need to think about the pillars in the nave..” explains Fr. Daniels to an attentive Mr. Bernard Fachon of France.*

### Report From Father Daniels

The Novitiate in Iloilo was safe even though it was in the line of the typhoon—the angels lifted the maelstrom at the right moment and it passed high overhead. The Brothers related how the clouds on high went mad but the Novitiate experienced only a very strong wind.

Not so much luck, however, for the

city of Tacloban in Leyte and its vicinity. We have faithful there and a small chapel. When finally we came into contact with them, great was our relief that none of our faithful had died, even though all around them literally thousands lost their lives. Our faithful related to us how they persevered in the rosary for five hours. Outside their homes, the waters rose 3 to 4 feet, but there, inside



*“Say, Fr. Tim, why are people looking at us funny?” asks Fr. Ghela as they walk down the street in typhoon ravaged Tacloban.*

where they were praying, only a little water entered . . . . Yet the doors were of simple wood and the ground level of their homes were lower than the outside. Certainly the angels worked overtime!

Some four weeks after the Typhoon, our superior ordered us to go to Tacloban to prepare the work of a large scale medical mission and re-building mission. What we saw in Tacloban City upon arrival was worse than words can describe. We have never seen the likes nor do we hope ever to see it again. The wind had raised the sea by 20 to 30 feet, which then swooped into the city. Big ships were thrown on the hapless homes, crushing, crashing and splintering them as if they were in a giant mince machine. Poor houses, concrete houses, big factories; all suffered the same lot. Concrete, steel and wood lay scattered as if some big bomb had blasted them to shreds. The smell was quite overpowering even four weeks later. Most of the dead had already been buried when we arrived but there was an immense lamentation of so many who had lost their dear ones and had not found their bodies. Even now, as we write you this letter, many bodies have not yet been found—probably carried out to sea.

The trash was heaped high as mountains everywhere. Electricity was gone; many slept under the open sky. Filthy water was everywhere and clean drinking water was hard to find.

So it was another four weeks later, at the end of January, that we began a medical mission and the rebuilding mission. We had some 115 volunteers from the four corners of the world and, in one week, our medical crew was able to see some 3,500 patients.

The Novitiate, Brothers and postu-



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lants were in charge of the rebuilding. A number of generous Australian men came to help, but, with limited access to building materials, it at first continued with difficulty. In most cases we were obliged to give the poor people a cash hand-out and ask them to rebuild their own houses with it. We did undertake to rebuild five homes, including the chapel which became a material store house, sleeping quarters and medical supply house. We hope Our Lord did not mind!? We spent two weeks working among the people, helping the medical mission and re-building homes. Since the work had not yet been completed when we returned, we contracted some Filipino workers to continue and finish it.

The trip to and fro was another experience, with constant set-backs. The weather had not cleared entirely and so the boats were constantly being cancelled, which left us stranded a number of times.

At times as these, we see human nature laid bare—the good side as well as the fallen. Some with the deepest gratitude, others with an incredible greed and jealousy. Love and hatred seems to come out at war in such times of strife.

In a city where filth and decay filled the air, we all got sick one after the other. Some ended up with three sicknesses all at once, which left them low for a few days.

Our chapel in Tacloban was always one of the small missions of our Filipino apostolate—about 20 to 30 souls. By the beginning of February it had risen to 105. It is another mystery of our strange human nature: to fall on our knees in difficult times and quickly forget Calvary when we are well and comfortable again. Ω



*Holy Family Chapel, Tacloban, sustained significant storm damage in the typhoon....*



*...but the Brothers and the Aussies soon put things right again (“no worries mate”);...*



*...in all, they rebuilt the chapel (above) and five houses of the faithful.*