

Dear Friends,

I don't even know where to start or how to describe what I saw when I visited Tacloban City - the "ground-zero" - and other near-by towns that received a direct hit by the recent super-typhoon Yolanda in Central Philippines. Perhaps the best way to put it is that the places look as if they've been bombed - not just in one particular location but entire towns. I tried to take pictures with my small digital camera as best as I could but couldn't manage after a while.

Most of the buildings - big or small, concrete or not - have been damaged either partially or totally. Most have lost their roofs. The entire towns is filled with twisted metals and GI sheets, piles of lumber, fallen utility posts and trees. The remains of the dead is still being collected and buried in mass graves - this, 3 weeks after the event.

It's really hard to describe. Thousands have fled to Manila and Cebu just to escape the stench of dead bodies and lack of anything - food, water, shelter, medical care. Thousands more are still in these towns either in evacuation centers which themselves have been damaged or under make-shift tents with tarps distributed by the relief agencies and soldiers from various governments.

Clean-up of the city has slowly begun but will take weeks or even months. Rebuilding is a major task as there are no materials locally available. Everything - from water to fuel - has to be ferried in from other islands. Thank God, several foreign governments have sent in soldiers and relief supplies to augment the Philippine soldiers and volunteers. Clearly these places and their people are rising from the ruins but it's a monumental task and they need all the help they can get. What is so impressive is that you still see the beauty of their faith and joy even in this tragic situation! An ordination of 7 priests was held at the badly destroyed Cathedral with no roof and they celebrated the Mass today for the closing of the diamond jubilee of the Archdiocese.

MOP has already been in the frontline by taking in several evacuee families in our mission in Cebu. We're also preparing to assist in the clean-up and repair of a convent of local nuns who have always been very hospitable to our Brothers whenever we go there, which is several times a year. Even with the convent roof blown away, the Sisters joyfully welcomed us and gave us accommodation in a room that is flooded. Well, that made the room cooler that night.

Also, we plan to build some houses for the poor who have lost their homes.

Some pictures are attached. God bless!

In His service,

Fr. Ambrose