



## A New Day in Paradise!

Reflections from Pastor John Slage on the Spring 2015 AIM Trip to the Philippines

On the morning of our second day on the Philippine island of Leyte, I awoke to a refreshing revelation. Stepping out the door and gazing about the lush grounds of the rented home just down the road from the church in Esperanza, I was struck with the thought, **Morning in Paradise.** Admittedly, it was probably all the majestic palms reaching up to that oh so blue tropical sky that colored my thinking. But the beauty of that place extended far beyond what the eye could see. After a week (and nearly a dozen worship services) in the Philippines, I had come to realize that there was in that place an unusual connection between men and God that is sadly lacking throughout much of my homeland.

Later that day at the church, I told the members that in the minds of Americans, their island palm trees are the emblem of paradise. And as I spoke of their brightly colored turquoise

houses, white sandy beaches and crystal blue waters, Pastor Jerry Bohol translated my words and grins of appreciation broke out between them.

But what a strange paradox is found here. While we perceive their Pacific islands as paradise, they are convinced that, No, no! Your America is the true paradise on Earth! Time and time again we witnessed the young and old alike get a faraway look in their eyes and murmur, I want to go to America! How could I convince them that we are not the paradise they think we are? Yes, we have great wealth as a nation and yes we take for granted the mountains of food in our stores. And yes, yes, we could scarcely get by a day without our air conditioning, indoor flush toilets and hot showers. And finally, yes, nearly every household in America has a car or truck, and many have two, three and even more. Truly, we have more possessions than these good people could even imagine, despite the images



of American prosperity that constantly bombard their shores.

And yet with all our prosperity and self-indulgences, America has lost some priceless things that our Filipino brothers and sisters still have. Close-knit families, friendliness and hospitality are still alive and well in the Philippines. Indeed, the smiles across their faces are so pervasive that the bureau of tourism even points out this national phenomenon in their advertising. All the while in America the pursuit of prosperity has brought neither widespread contentment nor happiness.

Outside this prosperity-paradise paradox, there is a great deal of similarity in our beliefs and how we conduct church in America and in the

Philippines. There is a structure and cadence to the Apostolic services that is at once familiar and reassuring to the visitor. But I must say, their level of worship in the Philippines is extremely intense, beyond anything I've ever experienced in my travels across the U.S. and Canada. Their worship is without restraint or benefit of air conditioning and they entertain the Spirit on and on until many are either slain in the Spirit or pass out in the tropical heat.

It is tempting to simply conclude that they worship God so because they have so very little else. But I couldn't help but think it also has to do with the humility, contentment and cheer that seemed to be everywhere. Perhaps there was a hidden blessing in their islands being repeatedly invaded, conquered and colonized by the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Brits, the Japanese and lastly, the Americans. Humility comes at a price and it is undoubtedly an imperative in maintaining a close connection with the Almighty.

I have read repeatedly that the modern Philippines is reaching out for

a new day of prosperity. And within their chrome and glass three-story shopping malls (surrounded by gritty 3<sup>rd</sup> world poverty), logoed apparel and love of Coca Cola and McDonald's, it is easy to see they are attempting to mimic American prosperity with all the gusto they can scrape together. The danger for Apostolic Filipinos (as they proudly display their Apple iPads, Nike shoes, Yamaha keyboards and Gibson guitars) is that they too hold something of an outward awe of our American brand of prosperity.

It's not that we wouldn't want to see any of God's elect prosper. The Apostle John wrote to his disciple Gaius that he wished above all things that he would prosper and be in good health even as his soul prospered. But I have somewhat of a fear that these precious people might someday trade in their paradise to join the ranks of



the Laodiceans who say they are rich and increased with goods and as a result, diminish their very special connection with God.

Perhaps that's why He's placed a burden upon American Apostolic missionaries to travel across the globe to preach sound doctrine, the love of the truth, holiness, and separation from the world. It will take all that and more. Like cautioning them from wanting to become just like us Americans.



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