

Jet News vol.1

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Milo

Christian

Vilmos

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Dear everyone, we are meeting again a month later, although my JET News covers a bit more time — even reaching back to last year. This is also the last such jump into the past. The next Jet News will already (hopefully) regularly talk about what happened in the previous month.

Now let's jump back for a moment to Spain (the photos show my NOVEMBER). Everyone from Poland will understand my delight with the sun (every day!) and the weather of 10–15°C. Taking advantage of this, on Saturday after service we went on a trip to Alquézar. Alquézar is a beautiful little town with the possibility of visiting stunning canyons.

We also had a funny situation when buying entrance tickets. We went in as a group of seven friends who arrived together to do some sightseeing, and when we were asked (for statistical purposes) where we were from, each of us named a different country.

Later, we drank wine in the evening on a terrace overlooking a romantic Spanish town, ate a previously prepared picnic, enjoyed the views and the weather (on the way there), relationships, presence, and shared prayer (on the way back). It was a day straight out of an American Christian movie: a group of friends, beautiful scenery, simple joy in beauty, lots of conversations, worship in the car.

Right after that came one of the most important weeks of formation. Dum dum dum (the tension rises).

A silent retreat — the Ignatian side of the community. For those not initiated: sometimes as Christians we are crazy enough to decide on a week in complete silence, alone with ourselves and God. That means no conversations, no books, no phone, no music, etc. A time when we decide to fully give all our time to meeting God.



Ours was special because it took place in Cartuja, which meant we didn't leave — we stayed in our house, although it changed completely. And if it seems to you that it's impossible to do a silent retreat in a house with 46 children and with people you know well — let me correct you. Chemin Neuf is a community that likes challenges.

On the evening before the retreat began, I escaped with Sara to Zaragoza for the pool and coffee — semi-legally. I'm very happy to have a friend here who, like me, interprets certain rules in a similar way.

EXPLANATION

There are "big" rules — like the one that the retreat starts at 9 p.m. and from then on there is silence. **MANDATORY POINT.**

And there are "small" rules — like that we should be at the common dinner to eat the last meal together before entering silence. That is, there is no planned option of eating dinner in the city that day (even though it's the weekend). At the same time, in the schedule dinner was not marked as a **MANDATORY POINT.**

So, mutually reassured, we spent the afternoon together at the pool and at dinner.

To calm everyone worried about my imperfect approach to following rules: if I had spent that afternoon in Cartuja, I would probably have been "using" the last few hours by overstimulating myself with phone access. Instead, I went to the pool and spent time with a friend. Following St. Ignatius' principle *tantum quantum* — "as much as" — meaning: follow the rules as much as they lead to growth.



moja ulubiona praca w czasie rekolekcji w ciszy- wykopywanie kamieni pozwalające wyładować całą swoją frustrację

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I'll write a bit more about this time because it was quite extraordinary. Extraordinary was definitely setting everything aside for a week and focusing on God. Extraordinary was the feeling that for that week we truly lived like Carthusian monks who had lived here before us (apart from meals — we still ate normally, not just soup and bread once a day). Extraordinary was that we shared this time as a community, even though we didn't say (almost) a single word.

It also taught me to focus on the goal — meeting God — and not on the tool, which is silence. (I'll immodestly admit that it's quite mature that I finally understood this.)



It was a very different experience to live silence with people I know and live with — the same house, the same people, yet everything was completely different. It was extraordinary how God worked in us, allowed Himself to be encountered, and led us — how He had prepared this house and this time for us beforehand.

Extraordinary was feeling the shared dynamic we lived through (hard and easy days, sin and reconciliation), even though you don't even look at those people. Extraordinary was that one day I could experience the pain of my sin and the joy of the freedom Jesus gives and how much He loves me. The evenings were also extraordinary — different from classic Ignatian retreats: stories of the Desert Fathers, The Chosen, worship, an evening of reconciliation



What's fascinating is that it truly is an extraordinary week — because when you talk to someone after formation about the most important week, in 90% of cases you'll hear: "The Spiritual Exercises."

I won't be different in this case and I'll tell you that for me it was a key week that changed an incredible amount, and without which I might have decided in December that I'm not going anywhere and am going back home.

So let's end this long description with a charismatic "Glory to the Lord" — "Amen" (I hope my friends reading this get it and find it funny)

Besides that, November and December in Zaragoza were a great time. Together with Sara we built a pull-up bar to get back in shape and did pull-ups during every break in the teachings.

At the beginning of Advent, together with families and children, we made Christmas decorations and decorated the abbey.



And since the sun was warming less and winter even reached Spain — and old walls have one downside. Even though they look amazing, they are terribly cold. Because of that, everyone started wearing jackets, getting runny noses, drinking hot cocoa, and eating chicken broth in which you could fish out surprises (chicken feet — yum).



Our youth group space also became very cozy thanks to lights, candles, decorations, and regular piano rehearsals. And that's how I spent my last weeks in Spain, although until the very last week I really didn't know whether I would return to Poland or fly to the Philippines, because my visa situation was — to use a euphemism — slightly complicated.



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Traveling through time and space, we move to France in the first week of December. It was a mission week, which we spent together in Hautecombe with other JET members doing HDS there (also formation).



Since car insurance didn't allow most of us to drive, Sara and I could peacefully feel like kids on vacation in the back seats. Our only worries were uncomfortable sleeping positions and the question "Are we there yet?" Fortunately, after 11 hours we arrived safely.



It was a very strange feeling to be in Hautecombe in winter and to sleep in the abbey, because for four years it has been a place of summer festivals and sleeping in tents for me. But I'm very glad for that week.

We had many important teachings and difficult exercises that confronted us with social inequality, privilege, injustice in the world, and the fact that sometimes we are powerless toward it, and sometimes we deliberately look

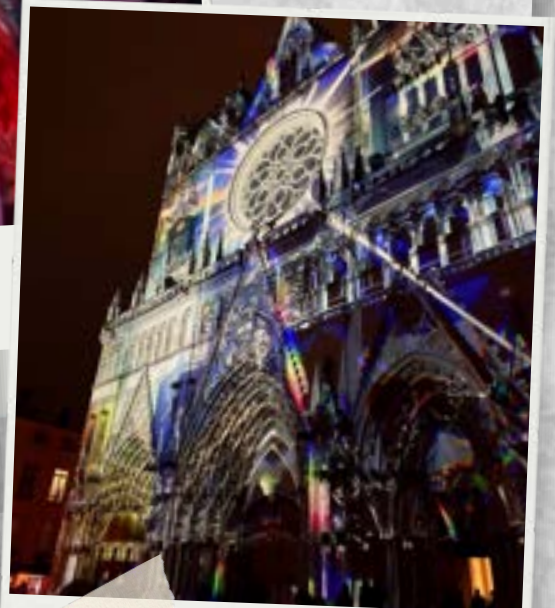
The most moving and difficult exercise was the one where we drew lots for tables at lunch: the table of Herod, Zacchaeus, Bartimaeus, and Lazarus. Each corresponded to a different social group, from the richest to the poorest, with different quantities and types of food.

The rule was that we couldn't interact with other tables. So the table of Herod ate an exquisite meal at a beautiful table with service, watching the table of Lazarus sit in trash and starve. At the same time, we could see all the leftovers that were "wasted" food.

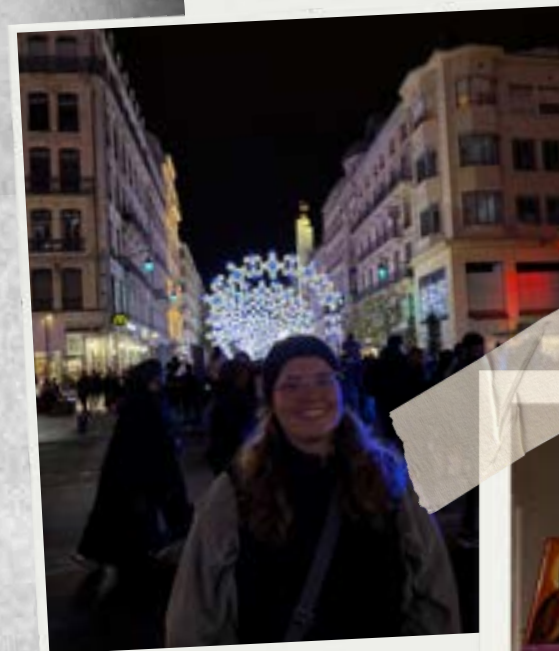


And although for us it was one meal, while for many people this is daily reality, we could understand the injustice — and also that sometimes we can do nothing about it, and sometimes we can, but we choose to look away.

Together with the Polish-Filipino group, we also managed to go to Lyon for La Fête des Lumières and meet Ada, who is also living in a community house in France this year. Thanks to conversations with the girls from the Philippines, I was also able to learn more about the mission they had both been part of.

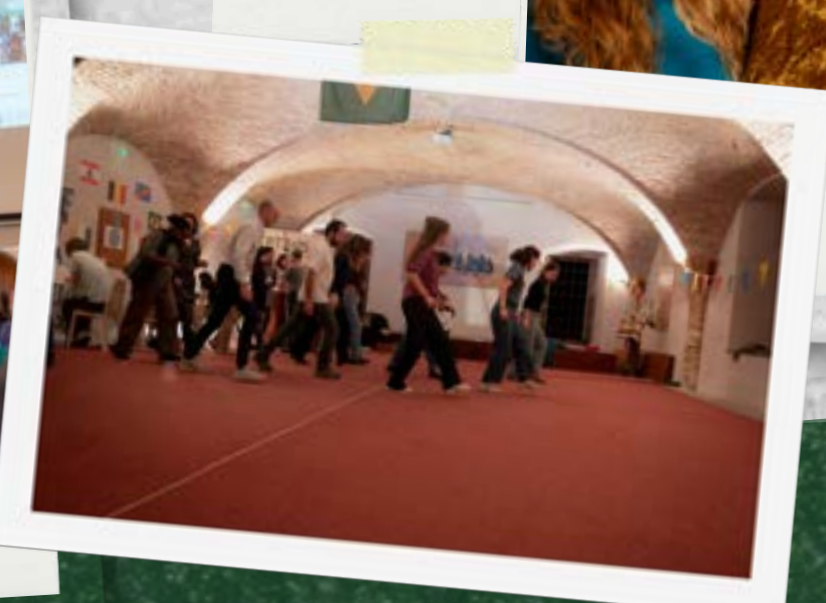
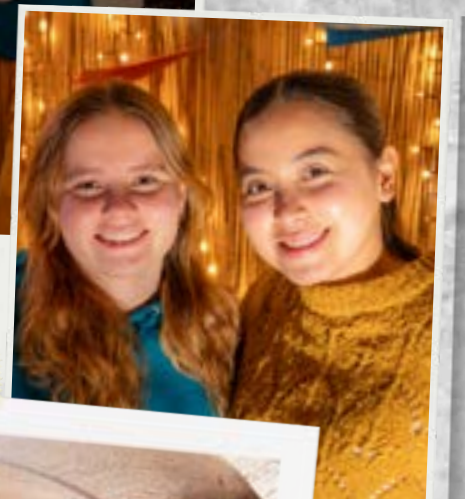


And on the weekend we had our sending Mass and a shared celebration. There was something extraordinary about the fact that the Gospel of the day was about the sending of the twelve apostles. In the Gospel reading, the names of the apostles were omitted. During the homily we heard that this was "so that everyone could identify with it," and then the "full version" for today was read — where instead of the apostles' names, our twelve names were inserted, because this year's JET promotion consists of twelve people. Coincidence?



So after a simple Mass and a simple sending prayer, a simple shared celebration awaited us, along with presenting to our families and friends the countries and missions we were going to. And even though my parents couldn't come, Ola, Vlad, and Agat (who also helped me with translations) created the most wonderful field game in the world for me, where I could feel like a little scout following clues and very complicated questions about the Philippines. Thanks to it, they reminded me that mission begins *ici et maintenant* — here and now — at the moment you encounter God in your life, and there is no turning back.

It was wonderful to remember this in Hautecombe, where four years ago, at my first festival, I heard about JET and began asking God whether this was really the crazy idea He was inviting me into.



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The last chapter before the Philippines is the one dedicated to the VISA. To describe it briefly, I can use one word: PROBLEM.

To give a bit more detail: at the end of November I flew to Poland to try to obtain it. I was supposed to have an appointment at the embassy, which — as it turned out — someone in Warsaw forgot about. Because of that, they almost didn't let me in. When they finally did, it turned out that documents were missing, and despite the best intentions, I wouldn't get the visa. Still, I'd rate the embassy visit 10/10 — much better than a university dean's office. There too it's hard to get in, there too you find out on the spot that you don't have all the documents and can't get anything done — but at the dean's office they're usually not so nice and you don't feel they want to help you.

I did, however, have the chance to meet friends, see snow, and spend time with family, which was very valuable for me, because I knew they wouldn't be able to come to Hautecombe for our sending weekend. After four days in Poland, I returned to Spain and waited for developments and the necessary documents.

A few days later I received a calming message that I would definitely get the visa before arriving in the Philippines (18.12), at the latest on 17.12. Everything great — except that my flight was on 16.12 from Barcelona, and the visa was to be collected in Poland.

Skipping the description of 20 different plan-change scenarios discussed with those responsible, and the contacts with airlines that agreed to reschedule my flight for "only" 21,000 PLN. Not skipping mentioning the enormous help and support I received from the community, friends, and families I met in Zaragoza. (Although when you know that all we can do is pray, you feel both supported and scared — haha.)

To finish the story:

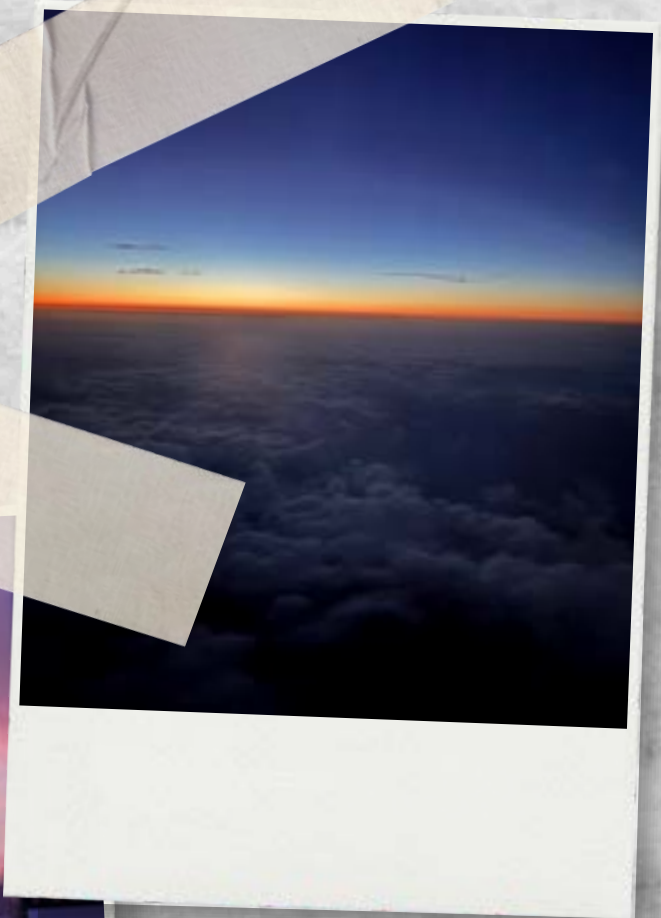
Until Wednesday, 11.12, I didn't know what I would do. On Tuesday, in yet another not-so-great prayer, I told God that I want to trust Him, that on my own I can't do it, and whatever happens will happen — but if He wants me there, I want to be there as part of His plan, and I leave mine behind.

And on Wednesday morning I learned that I would fly with a 30-day visa, and three hours later that I actually got a one-year visa and could pick it up. You can imagine my overreaction and the fact that everyone who wanted to and didn't want to had to hear that I got the visa. (In reality, everyone wanted to and rejoiced with me.)

The next day I flew to pick it up, which felt like a second Christmas present. Because for the last time before departure, I could see my family, for which I'm very grateful.

On Saturday I returned to Zaragoza for the last service. I spent half a day fighting with packing my suitcase so that it would meet the airline's weight limit. I said goodbye to the entire Zaragoza family, the community, and the beautiful abbey, which after those three months had truly become my home.

And two days later I flew from Barcelona to Manila.



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And so, after
32 hours,
2 planes,
15 hours of layover in Shanghai,
and a change of time zone,
I landed in Manila.

My first three impressions:

- hot (in winter it's 28°C at night),
- loud and crowded (even at 2 a.m.),
- even here they don't believe I'm an adult (at customs they were making sure that I really wasn't 16).

Since jet lag caught up with me, the only thing I did that day was take a shower (and here a small DISCLAIMER about a cultural curiosity).

In most places in the Philippines there are no "normal" showers. People use a bucket and a TABO to pour water over themselves. This gives you the opportunity to feel like you're at a scout camp 365 days a year while washing.

The first thing I took part in was an evening Christmas party for students, and the next day another one for the staff. After these two busy days, I went on vacation with the community to La Union (the capital of surfers — although we didn't see any). Starting with a vacation is also a good option — surprising, but in a positive way. We saw the ocean, mountains, a beautiful forest, rivers, and waterfalls where we swam. And although 28 degrees and swimming in the ocean didn't really put us in a Christmas mood, it was a great opportunity to get to know the community before everyone got busy with everyday responsibilities. On the downside, it's not the best way to get to know the house and how it functions. On the plus side: Mass on a terrace with a view of the ocean, the sound of the waves in the background, prayer at sunrise or sunset over the ocean — that's something that gives you a 100% chance of falling in love with the Philippines.

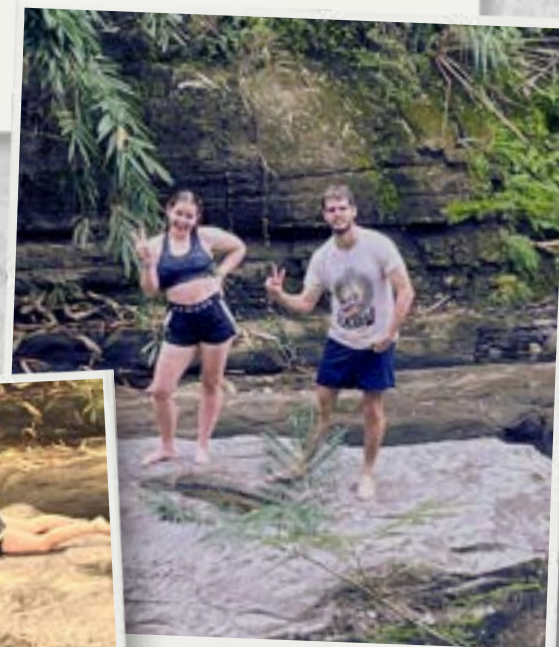
On December 24 we returned to Manila, and we spent the afternoon preparing for Christmas Eve dinner.

Since I was responsible for dessert, I was supposed to bake some Polish cake. I wanted to go for a traditional poppy seed roll, but flour isn't really easy to buy here.

Besides, when I started explaining what I needed for the cake and that in Poland we use poppy seeds simply for baking and not as a drug, and that poppy seed cake is really traditional for Christmas Eve, and then realized that yeast might also be a problem — I changed the plan.

In the end, a slightly modified version of gingerbread was made. We can be proud — everyone already associated Poland with good cakes, and my gingerbread didn't ruin that.

On December 25 in the morning we prepared a Christmas lunch, which we ate with students and teenagers from SanLo after Mass. In the evening, we were invited for dinner to ate Shili's family.



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The time between Christmas and New Year I spent at a mini version of Jericho. Mini because there were only 8 of us and mini because it lasted only 3 days.

It was more like an 18–30 weekend. On the first day we went on a trip to the mountains (on what was supposedly a beginner's trail), after which we swam in a river and had sharing in fraternities. On the second day we went to Mega Mall, a gigantic shopping center, where we went ice skating (and I thought this would be my first season without skates in a long time). After a semester of skating, as a qualified PE teacher I also taught those who were skating for the first time.

So, to be fair — the Jericho topic about false images of God: completed.

On the third day we spent the morning in Intramuros, a historic old part of the city built by the Spaniards and used by the Japanese as a prison during World War II. It is also the place where the national hero of the Philippines, José Rizal, was imprisoned.

We happened to be there during a celebration, and the whole park was full of Boy Scouts. There was no opportunity to exchange scarves because I didn't have mine with me, but that's a special mission for the future.

I also tried avocado-flavored ice cream and cheese-flavored ice cream.

For now, rating: 6/10 — not rejecting this invention entirely. Out of all the things I've tried so far, I can say that I really don't like green jelly (it tastes like some kind of leaves) and coconut milk.

Besides that, around the New Year period I had a lot of time for walking and exploring the area, getting to know the house a bit, attending Mass in Tagalog, etc.

I spent New Year's Eve with Shareen, Kyle, and Maru watching fireworks from the roof of SanLo, singing karaoke, eating coconut tart — which was actually my first time eating fresh coconut — meeting Maru's friends and getting to know the culture of spending New Year with friends and family at a garden table placed in the middle of the street. Even though I didn't really have any expectations for New Year's Eve, I am very grateful for how it turned out — that I could spend it with others, go to Mass, and experience the Philippines "from the inside."

On January 1 we also met up to play basketball together, and the next few days were very chill, with watching movies during dinner. Since the social mission hadn't started yet and it was also vacation time for the brothers and sisters, SanLo itself was quite empty. I spent time alternately with the brothers while the sisters went on vacation, two days alone (trying new lunch flavors with Kyle and Shar), and with the sisters when they returned (chill lunch with a movie).

While waiting for January, I also had a lot of time to ask myself a question similar to the one I had at the beginning in Zaragoza. Only this time it wasn't:

What am I doing here / what am I doing with my life?

But rather: Why me? Why do I believe You called me here

when there are so many people who could do this better / are more open / know the language / pray more / would fit better / help more?

And that was the hardest part of this whole beginning in the Philippines.

Fun Facts Corner

- I live in Barangay 412 (that's the smallest administrative unit, kind of like a neighborhood).
- The community loves playing board games — I'll come back knowing a lot of new games, especially card games.
- Rice is really eaten 3 times a day.
- You can go ice skating in the Philippines — and it's inside a mall.
- McDonald's has meals with rice, and to drink a Coke float — Coca-Cola with vanilla ice cream.
- People of similar age living on the same street form friend groups — "teams." These teams have names and T-shirts, and for example, they spend New Year together.



Thank you for supporting me and this mission. I pray for you.

Blessed Klara