

October 10, 2013

Hello to the Church in Los Alamos! I hope you are enjoying the changing of the season. we too are experiencing the changing of the season, but instead of Summer to Fall, it is Rainy season to Dry season. It still rains, but not as much as August and early September. Soon the rains will cease altogether. People are harvesting the corn that has been drying on the stalk, and some are trying to squeeze one last crop out of the ground: beans for seed, cabbage, whatever one can manage. We have our own small garden, where we are growing onions, lettuce, cabbage, beans, sunflowers, and a second attempt at green chile.

Many people have asked us about cultural differences that we have noticed, and we wanted to describe some now. We have waited because first impressions can be inaccurate, and I suppose I should still reserve the right to change my mind after more observation and experience.

Some cultural differences are very obvious to the senses, things like food, dress, language, music, etc. The dress is a big mish-mash of African and Western styles, so it isn't unusual to see the same man wearing a more traditional African-style knee-length tunic with matching trousers to Mass one week, and a polo shirt and khakis the next. Most people are very particular about clothes, especially keeping clothes clean. It seems our family is woefully inadequate at being mindful of the dirt and mud of everyday life, which comes from living in a world that is mostly paved.

As far as music goes, the people here love to sing! There aren't many musical instruments to speak of, so in Church the songs are accompanied only by percussion. The singing is very beautiful, and it is uplifting to hear the whole congregation sing a crowd favorite. People don't relegate singing to Church, any time is appropriate for singing. People sing while at work, while walking, while waiting, any time.

There are other differences, like the way healthcare works, the way food-buying works, the way you go about daily life, and it would take many letters to describe them all! Some things have already begun to seem ordinary, like riding in a small taxi with up to 11 people crammed in, while others still remain shocking, like the constant disregard for basic sanitation.

The most significant cultural differences by far are also the ones that give us the most trouble. They are the differences you can't readily see, taste, touch. In our formation, we were taught that culture is an iceberg: the tip is the part you can see, but most remains underwater... and that's the part that you collide with! These are things like ideas about the

family, time and its importance, the meaning of friendship, courtesy rules, etc. To give an example of one of these differences, as a teacher, when I am in front of the class, I expect that there will be no interruptions. Yet, a late student arrives and interrupts me mid-sentence to greet me and say "good morning, sir." Now, I am bothered that he has been so rude (in my eyes) to interrupt me just to greet. I would much rather he slink into his seat and not disturb the class. But for the young man, for him it would be rude to NOT greet the teacher upon arrival. So, for things like this, I must learn to not let the little interruptions bother me. This is hard when there are so many little interruptions!

The sense of time and what is important factors in here. If something is more important, it happens first. So, when the Monday and Friday assemblies go long, as they always do because they almost always start late, the first period loses most of its class time. If you have business with someone, but they are with someone else, that person might put their current meeting on hold to deal with you, if you are perceived as more important. I was ushered into the Diocesan Chancellor's office when I had a question, and he kicked out the person he was meeting with in order to accommodate me! I felt a little embarrassed because I didn't think my questions were all that important, they could wait.

Now, these are some of the places we have found differences that cause friction, but it's not all terrible! In fact, there are many cultural differences that we love. People love to just drop by here, usually "just to greet." This is always a joy, be it fifteen minutes or two hours. Sometimes it pushes back dinner an hour, but the importance of people over the schedule is something we might do well to learn. On numerous occasions the various religious sisters living on campus have brought us food out of the blue. How generous! It makes one want to be generous back, and that provides another opportunity for greeting.

One thing that is the same is the faith. Of course, it is expressed in local, culturally different ways, but it is the same Mass, the same Eucharist, the same Creed that we profess. Regardless of cultural ideas about time, In the Mass, the timeless rules: our God present in the Eucharist is eternal, and when we receive communion we are united to the whole Church, here in Kumbo, in Los Alamos, in Virginia, in Rome, everywhere.

As always, thank you for your prayers, and we continue to pray for you!

In Christ,

Eric Horne

with Logan, Helena, James, Max, Isabelle, and Sally