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WHICH PARTICULAR place in a barrio, a town or a city repeatedly gathers a lot of people any time of the day, especially early in the morning or late in the afternoon? The answer is: Market! Market! Market!

Yes. In this place, your attention is caught by all kinds of fish, vegetable, fruit, meat or dairy product. Here, you also see people prone to doing things that aggravate the country's problems: garbage disposal, perennial floods, polluted environment or climate change. Once you are here, you get to observe buyer-seller transactions that make plastic bags part and parcel of any commercial agreement. Apparently, putting the object of the transaction inside the plastic bag signals the end of the business deal.

Plastic bag for bangus, plastic bag for ampalaya, plastic bag for tomatoes, plastic bag for this and that and so on and so forth. Every item, big or small, cheap or costly, wet or dry, goes into a plastic bag. Buy just a single item; say, one camote, one apple, or one sayote, and right away, the seller opens a plastic bag and shoots the lone item into this ubiquitous but problem-giving container.

In fact, a wet or watery item like fish or chicken settles not only into one plastic bag but into two or three. One kilo of galunggong is placed inside a first plastic bag that is small, thin and transparent; this is then thrust into the second plastic bag that is bigger, thicker and translucent, with a handle; finally, the already-twice-covered galunggong is placed inside a third plastic bag that is the biggest and the thickest, and with a sturdier handle. To accommodate a mixture of purchased items, this third one, the "major-major" plastic bag, needs to be the strongest among the three plastic bags.

So, now, do your math. Count the number of people buying things from the market plus the number of items they take home daily. Start from vegetables: eggplants, ampalaya, tomatoes, onions, etc.; next, meat: pork, beef, lobsters, etc.; then, fruits: atis, mangoes, oranges, etc; and, groceries: sardines, milk, coffee, soaps, oil, etc. Unless these are bought at a big supermarket, not a single one of these enumerated items is exempt from sloping down into three different plastic bags. Thus, every day, each market buyer accumulates more than a dozen plastic bags in his or her house. Multiply the number of market buyers with the approximate number of plastic bags taken home by the buyers, and what do you get? Thousands and thousands of used plastic bags in a city in one day!

One thing more: Not all these used plastic bags are disposed of properly. Light as kites that are easily blown by the wind, several of these plastic bags travel from place to place or dangle from one structure to another. Further, the use of these plastic bags by some barangays as town-fiesta decorations contribute to the easy and speedy travel of these plastic bags.

In some places, you see plastic bags bulging with garbage that people purposely hang from the trunk of a tree. Try roaming some streets in the city or in several not-so-posh subdivisions in Metro Manila, and witness a tree trunk in front of two or more houses used as a hanging garbage can. With many colored plastic bags hanging from every side or from the lowest branches, the pitiful tree appears like a Christmas tree.

Think of trees carrying heavy loads of garbage until the arrival of a city-garbage truck collector, or their exposure to pollution and vandalism. Definitely, trees put in this pitiful situation, lacking love and care from people around them, refuse to grow robustly and abundantly in any area. Treating trees in this manner means disregarding the beneficial effects of trees to humanity.

Much has been written and said about climate change, going green, planting trees and so on. Likewise, words have appeared in some daily papers about the Senate's drafting of a law prohibiting the excessive production and use of plastics. Cognizant of the damaging effects of the extensive and wanton use of plastic bags, the Senate must work on this plastic bill in an expedient and fast-tracked manner. I hope one provision of this law will impose a penalty on people caught hanging plastic garbage bags from the trunk of a tree, and on residents using plastic bags as banners or decorations during town fiestas.

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