

Chilean ambassador calls rescue of Chilean miners a triumph of faith, spirit

BY ANNA WEAVER

Catholic Standard

Faith had much to do with the survival and successful rescue of the 33 Chilean miners trapped underground for two and a half months, according to the Chilean ambassador to the United States and the Archdiocese of Washington's episcopal vicar for Hispanic Catholics.

In an Oct. 18 interview at the Embassy of Chile, Ambassador Arturo Ferandois described the miners' rescue as "a triumph of spirit over a destiny that was probably death."

"I think Chile is a country of deep faith, there's no question about that, at all levels, from different parts of society," he said. "In this story of the miners, this really became very clear."

'THINKING ABOUT GOD'

Ferandois says the miners were able to stay alive for 17 days before being found and the two months they waited for an access tunnel to be dug to reach them thanks to their organization and collaboration in food rationing, maintaining a clean environment, and not fighting, but also the "spirit and faith which were centrally and critically important for reaching the end."

"Because you know if they were defeated by a lack of hope, we would not have found them alive," he said. The miners themselves may not all have been active believers, but Ferandois pointed to accounts that "some of them, who were not as deeply involved in faith, began to pray and began to think about God."

The Chilean people felt especially connected to the working class miners, he said, adding that "all Chileans are proud and



CS PHOTO BY RAFAEL CRISOSTOMO

Arturo Ferandois, the ambassador of Chile to the United States, praised the faith of the rescued miners and their supporters.

learning these lessons" from the miners.

There was also an outpouring of support in the D.C. area. "The Chilean community here felt extremely connected to the miners," he said. "They wanted to express prayers and concern the whole time they were trapped."

On Oct. 12, the Chilean embassy set up a large TV screen in front of the building broadcasting news of the rescue process, and several hundred people spontaneously showed up to watch and wait for the miners to emerge above ground.

When the first miner came up, Ferandois said, "There was an explosion of emotions, explosion of happiness, explosion of unity as I've never seen in my life!"

Bethesda Mass and procession to include prayers of thanks for Chilean miners' rescue

This year Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Bethesda is dedicating its annual procession and Mass in honor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel to the rescue of the Chilean miners.

The Oct. 31 event begins with recitation of the rosary at 12:30 p.m. followed by a 1:15 p.m. procession, the

1:30 p.m. Spanish language Mass, and a reception.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the patroness of Chile and Our Lady of Lourdes Parish has a large Chilean community among its parishioners.

For more information, contact the parish office at 301-654-1287.

He added that his job as Chilean ambassador is to show the United States and the world what Chile is like, but it can sometimes be hard to give concrete examples. A story like the miners rescue, he says, makes it easy to explain to the world, "This is Chile."

AN EXAMPLE TO EVERYBODY

Washington Auxiliary Bishop Francisco González, the episcopal vicar for Hispanic Catholics in the Archdiocese of Washington, said of the miners, "You had to be a very strong person to stand the pressure of that, being where they were, not knowing if they'd be rescued."

"They seemed to have a very human conviction and principles that came from their faith," he added.

Bishop González said Chile has weathered not only this mining disaster but also the Feb. 27 earthquake there because the country works together. "I think [these events] united many of the people in the country," he said of the strength of the Chilean people. "They survive and they con-

tinued on ... They set an example for all of us that if we put our mind and hearts together, we can solve a lot of difficult situations."

The Spanish-born bishop said it was "the faith not only of the miners but of the whole group" that led to such a happy end, including the rescue workers and technicians, those that donated aid and drill equipment, the Chilean president Sebastián Piñera and family members who waited at the mine site for the men to come out, and the people of Chile.

As he followed the rescue coverage, Bishop Gonzalez said he was touched to see a rescuer make the sign of the cross before going down to begin the rescue operation and to see one miner emerge above ground and immediately kneel and pray. "At the end, after everybody was rescued, [the miners] mentioned God again," he said, and Chilean churches rang their bells.

"[This can] teach us to be grateful for even little things, and especially life which is the greatest gift I think," Bishop Gonzalez concluded.