

South America Ordains First Married Deacon

Recently the ordination of the first married deacon in South America took place near the Parroquia San Jose Obrero in Bolivia, run by priests from the Rochester diocese. Father Daniel Torrey reports that the ceremony, in a pueblo, was not only historic but dramatically colorful with the county people in bright attire, the entire rite in the Aymara language, and a giant fiesta afterwards. Following is a reflection on the event, written by the Bishop of Cochabamba, one of five bishops present.

By Bishop Armando Gutierrez Of Cochabamba, Bolivia

A few days ago we assisted with pride and hope at the ordination to the Deaconate of Alejandro Mamani in a small community high in the Bolivian Altiplano.

He is the first deacon to be ordained in our country for the permanent service of God and our brothers in this pilgrim church.

At 41, married and the father of one son, he is a mature man. He had at his side during the ceremony, as he has had in his life, his wife and son. For 10 years he has worked with consistency and sacrifice as a local religious leader together with Bishop Esquivel and Bishop Schierhoff (both are auxiliary bishops of La

Paz; Bishop Schierhoff is a diocesan priest from St. Louis, Mo.). During the last two years he was prepared for the diaconate in a school of apostolic formation conducted by clergy and laymen in a small nearby community.

In an unforgettable liturgical ceremony, beneath brilliant sun and clear blue sky, in the church of the expansive countryside, Alejandro received the imposition of the bishop's hands. He is now marked forever with the sacramental sign which includes him among the hierarchy, to preach, to sanctify and to guide the People of God in this rural setting.

Hundreds of the faithful from his community of Hilata and the surrounding countryside were joined by priests, religious and laity from the city. They participated in the celebration with their songs and prayers in Aymara.

After the reading of the Gospel, which is his new responsibility, and after the sermon by the Bishop, Alejandro preached for the first time, anointed by the Holy Spirit. He did it with so much ease and responsibility that he touched the hearts and minds of all present, including the Apostolic Delegate. At the time of the Communion he distributed consecrated bread and wine to those present. After the Mass he solemnly baptized two infants



Above left, Alejandro Mamani, his wife and son, prostrate themselves before Bishop Ademar Esquivel. And at right, Bishop Esquivel congratulates South America's first married deacon and his family.

from his own community. Thus he exercised the new functions that were conferred upon him: to preach, to celebrate the Word, to celebrate the Sacraments.

We have witnessed an historic moment in the life of the Church and the country which opens a hope for a better future. It is just the beginning of a great apostolic and missionary movement. One man coming from among his own people, who speaks to his brothers in their own language, and who shares with them according to their own mentality. He will treat them, with an intimacy that others can not achieve even after years of living with them.

As a result of this there are many questions which God and time have given us the responsibility to answer. Will not this ordination of Alejandro open the way to the diaconate for other mature, married men? Will this not encourage future vocations for lay religious leaders, deacons, and even priests? After him there are 72 others who are in preparation. Does this number not remind us of the other 72 whom the Savior sent in mission? They together with the 12, and with Peter at the head, founded the Church which extends to the whole world.

After Alejandro, the pioneer, there springs forth the hope that within a few years there will be in the Altiplano, and in other areas of the country, apostles who announce in Aymara, in Quechua and other native tongues the Good News. Bolivia and the Pilgrim Church in our vast continent will have sufficient apostles to evangelize her own children, to bring them the benefits of progress so they can live in conditions fully human and truly Christian.

The event in Hilata calls us to other types of reflection. Does this not make us think about the qualities of the people from the poorer sections of the country in whom there exists unknown personal values of a race that has been sleeping for centuries? Does this not make us realize that apostles can even come from these communities to evangelize in the city which today is so far from faith in God because of materialism and a lack of religious vocations?

Mary admirably sang in the Magnificat of her joy in the Savior proclaiming the great things that the future has in store for us. The plan of God far surpasses any plans of men. She sang of her own experience: The Lord brings down the proud and raises up the humble. He fills up the hungry with good things and sends the satisfied away with empty hands.



THE OPEN WINDOW Fr. Louis Hohman

Q. In regard to the obligation of Sunday Mass, the magisterium interpreted this for centuries as a law, that had to be obeyed, provided facts and situations were not an obstacle. Why is conscience now the most important requisite? Is this human characteristic now infallible? Does it take precedence over the laws of God? Are not many punished because they chose to follow their consciences instead of the Rules of the Game? Do not many in "good" conscience believe they are unjustly punished even by God Himself? If someone is floundering in "left field," is it not my duty as a brother player to direct him to "home plate"?

Perhaps more problems would be easily solved with less theology and a little more religion.

A. I hope I can sort out the many thoughts you have presented here because they are the basic problem of many people like yourself. You speak of the magisterium interpreting the Sunday Mass obligation as a law which had to be obeyed and a sentence later ask if conscience takes precedence over a law of God.

There is some confusion here. The Law of God states that we must keep holy the Sabbath or Lord's Day. It does not specify precisely how we are to keep it holy. The law of the Church does make this specification when it commands us to assist at Mass on Sundays. The Church is using its given power to make laws and declares it a serious obligation because the obligation to Divine Worship is serious. So the matter under consideration is a Law of the Church.

My next point is that we must keep law and conscience separate. A law which binds, whether it be of God or the Church, is meant to be a guidepost along the road of life for our benefit. It is external to us. Conscience is the mind determining whether a particular act is to be done or omitted. Law says, you have a serious

obligation to worship God in the Mass on Sunday. Conscience says, there is a law that I must worship God by attendance at Mass on Sunday. I should therefore do so because God says so and besides I know it is a good thing to do.

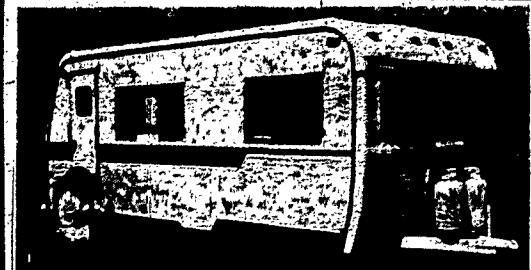
Or conscience may say, the law tells me I must attend Mass but I just can't leave my sick mother; or the law says: I should but I get only one week of vacation a year, and I have a chance to go fishing, so I judge God would not mind if I missed once like this; or conscience may say, I know there is a law which commands attendance at Sunday Mass but it is ridiculous for me to go because I just can't get anything out of it.

Now, you have already, I think, made a decision which of these consciences is a right conscience and which are wrong consciences. But the issue is whether the person or persons with wrong consciences are to blame for their wrong conscience. And the "blame" part is something you and I can't really know. We can only say, "It sure looks as though that guy is blameworthy." If you want to do that, well

You also ask — is conscience infallible? By no means. Now I ask — must we follow our conscience if we really believe it is right? The answer is yes.

Another question you have — why is conscience now the most important requisite? Does it take precedence over the laws of God? Conscience is more important only in the sense that it is the decision of a person and will determine a person's action. The law of God is more important because even if the person breaking it is not guilty because he is in ignorance, still great evil may be done. No guilt but a lot of evil.

Finally when you talk about the people who are punished for not going to Mass, you sound as though you have a pipeline to eternity we don't have. All I know and care is that God treat the person as he deserves.



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