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Bishop Clark in South America

A REPORT TO THE DIOCESE

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

On Jan. 12, 1981, Father Peter Deckman and I left Rochester for South America. Our purpose was to visit our Sisters of St. Joseph serving in Brazil and our Sisters of Mercy working in Chile.

In addition, to expressing to the Sisters the love and support of all of the people of the Diocese of Rochester, the trip had a second purpose. It marked the beginning of five more years of service in Bolivia by Peter Deckman. When I returned to Rochester he returned to the Maryknoll Center at Cochabamba, Bolivia, from which he will be assigned.

What follows is a modest attempt to tell something of the story of that trip. It is not a travelogue and so the story will not be told in terms of square miles, scenic beauties, places to see and things to do.

It is rather a story of faith and loving service as that story unfolds in the lives of 16 religious women who make us all stronger by what they do.

Because the story is of humble service, committed love for the poor, and self-sacrifice it can not be told in terms of measure and quantity. One who seeks to tell it must grapple with spiritual values and faces the challenge of putting into writing experiences and realities which are almost impossible to describe in simple words.

For this reason I have tried as much as possible bring the story home in the words of our Sisters. They were kind enough to tape something of their part of the story in response to my question, "Would you please tell the people at home anything you wanted like to about your faith experience of mission work in Brazil/Chile?"

Pete took the pictures; I transcribed and selected excerpts from the tapes; the story belongs to the Sisters.



BRAZIL

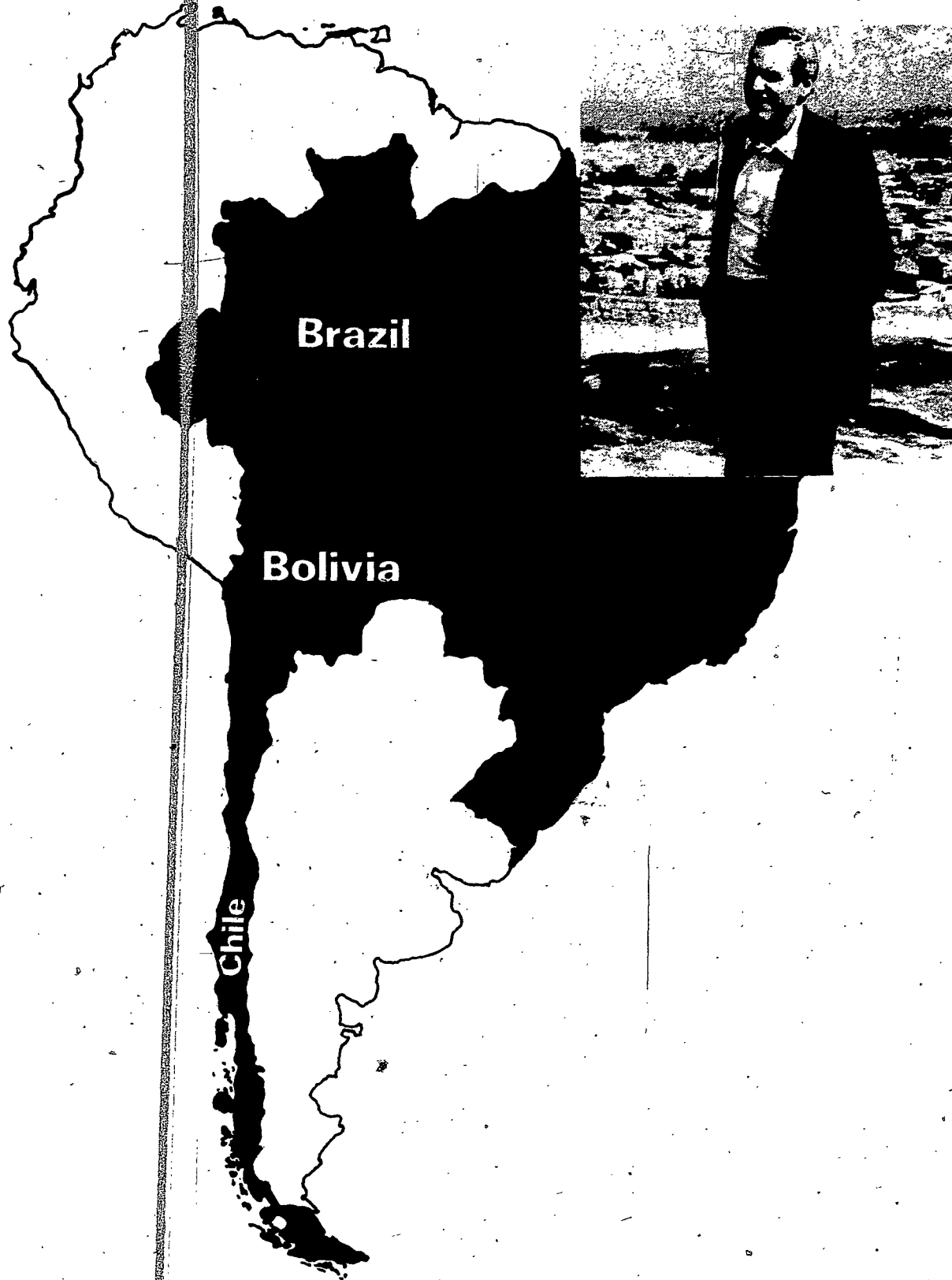
Sao Paulo: When we left Rochester yesterday the temperature was -20°F. In Sao Paulo it was +80°F. That change in temperature became for me a symbol of the adjustment to be made as we entered Brazil.

Fr. John Drexel, OMI, from St. Helen's Parish, Rochester met us and, with three other Oblate priests, hosted Pete and me.

John and the other men live together in a favela, a slum community at the edge of the city. For the vast majority of the hundreds of thousands who live in the favela of Sao Paulo electricity, plumbing, heating, employment, adequate nutrition, proper health care are good things enjoyed only by others.

It is hard living.

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OBSERVATIONS



I would like to conclude by listing in no particular order some impressions/convictions/hopes which I carry home with me.

1. The Church in Latin America is a Church struggling to come to grips in the light of faith with political and economic systems which oppress the poor. The Church is vocal, often fearless and frequently owns the only voice strong enough to speak on behalf of the very weak.

2. This option for the poor so forcefully made at Puebla is something for which the Church in Latin America is paying a steep price. But it is an investment already bearing fruit because there is a rebirth of faith occurring there.

3. As a result of this trip I am aware of the need to become more knowledgeable of the economic and political situation of our neighbors to the South. In addition to that it is my judgment that we in North America will miss a rare opportunity if we do not learn from the experience of the Church in Latin America.

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