

Editorial & Opinion

Airport recollections of a busy South American journey

Along
the Way

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Monday, January 25 — Miami Airport: I am on the way home from a two-week visit to our Sisters of St. Joseph in Brazil, and to our Sisters of Mercy and Father Charlie Mulligan who are working in Santiago, Chile. The pace of the visit was fast and the days were rather full, but I tried to make notes about the events of each day. I offer some of those notes below and will conclude with some general reflections on the experience.

Brazil

Tuesday, January 12 — Goiania: This is my first visit to Goiania, which is the site of the SSJ formation programs. Sisters Sue Wills and Pat Frisk met me at the airport and took me to their house in the neighborhood called *Nova Esperanca*, New Hope. It is poor, very poor, and the sisters tell me that alcohol and drugs are major problems. There is much violence and little hope that the young will ever break out of the circle of poverty in which they are caught.

Ellen Kuhl and Anadir, one of the Brazilian women now professed as a Sister of St. Joseph, welcome us. We eat, take a short walk in the neighborhood and talk for a long time. It is wonderful to be here.

Wednesday, January 13 — Goiania: We walked in the neighborhood for quite a while today. It is a joy to experience the love the people have for the sisters and a special grace to witness the desire of the sisters to share the people's journey of faith. There is a hospitality here that is very engaging. The people have very little, but they are generous in sharing their joy and their hospitality. Beautiful Joan of Arc took great pride in giving me the photograph of herself, her two sisters and brothers.

I have agreed to try liturgy in Portuguese on Friday evening, so I went to the planning meeting with Anadir. We met with about 20 there, and they were extremely patient with my efforts. I am delighted about this. Any concern about language pales against the enthusiasm and joy they bring to the planning.

I think also tonight of some striking, lively teenage boys I meet today. Several have been involved in serious crimes. One in particular reminds me of a great kid I know at home, and I wonder why one is in such peril and the other doing so well? And I wonder what my life would have been like if I had had the start the young Brazilian had. His father took off early, and his mother is a victim of alcoholism.

Thursday, January 14 — San Felix: I rise at 4:15 a.m. to catch a 6:15 plane to San Felix. Sue is the brave one who came with me. A three-stop flight in a small plane got us to San Felix at about 11 a.m. I didn't even know where I was until Marlene Roeger and Jean Bellini came to the door of the plane and told me to get moving! No announcements, no signs.

All of the pastoral agents from the prelature are gathered for a week of study and reflection on the theme of the Church and politics. I had lunch with Jean and Marlene, and then sat in on one of the lectures.

It is a great thrill to meet Pedro Casaldaliga who is bishop of the prelature. I have read his work and a good deal about him. He is slight, but powerful in his presence and in the way he speaks. I had a deep sense in meeting him that there is something important for me in him — not only for what he is saying but for the way he has been shaped by the faith and the human struggle of his poor people. I love his freedom and courage.

At the end of the liturgy, Pedro commented on our communion of faith and gave a booklet made by the Indians to deliver to the professor from Rio and a beautiful German-made Christmas candle for me.

Two events I never expected occurred at the end of the day: ice cream sundaes on the bank of the Araguaia River with Jean, Marlene and Geraldo, and a beautiful serenade later by Marlene and three others. All beautiful voices, haunting music.

Friday, January 15 — San Felix: Crossed the Araguaia by boat this morning to walk through an Indian Village on the island, then on to the airport for the flight back to Goiania with Jean and Marlene.

The liturgy tonight was magnificent. The

planning team was there, and so were many whose homes we visited earlier in the week. We stayed a long time with the kids and then came home for a late supper, only to find that some other friends from the neighborhood had come to visit.

Saturday, January 16 — Goiania: Anadir, Sue and I rose early to catch the early bus to Uberlandia. Ellen, Marlene and Jean took a bus that left several hours later and arrived shortly after we did. We join the older sisters at a diocesan retreat house just outside Uberlandia. The sisters are here for a week of study of the early documents of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

It's great to see the sisters all together. Katherine Popowich, Ann Lafferty, Elaine Hollis and Dolores Turner are all there when we arrive. Barb Orczyk, Chris Burgmaier, Maureen Finn and Kay Foos were all here on previous visits, and it is great to see them all again. It was especially good to see Nega and Joana, the other two Brazilian women who have made their professions. People settled in through the evening. There was always a large conversation going on, but people floated in and out of it as they unpacked or prepared supper and tomorrow's liturgy.

Later on, many of us took a swim in the pool which had just been cleaned and was still only half full.

As I write this tonight, I think of the wealth of skill, experience, faith and commitment represented by the women here. They are remarkable and, I believe, contribute deeply to the life of our local Church in Rochester.

Sunday, January 17 — Uberlandia: Once again I was treated to a serenade — this time at dawn. I am not frequently up at dawn, but if I could be wakened in such a beautiful manner every day, I would welcome it. When I found out later that the music at liturgy was taped and that they were sending me a copy, I asked Marlene if they would also tape the song about the moonlight, which I enjoyed so much. She said she would.

The Mass was beautiful. The sisters once again were very patient with my lumbering Portuguese. And they also offered me two surprise anniversary gifts — a statue of Mary done in soapstone and a Brazilian scene done in copper.

My flight from Uberlandia to Sao Paulo was delayed for eight hours. Katherine was immensely helpful in organizing things. She called Chile to say I would arrive the next day and even made arrangements for me to stay with John Drexel in Sao Paulo tonight.

One good thing came from the long wait. I had a chance to become acquainted with Rubia who will be admitted to the novitiate on Monday. Am much impressed by her.

Chile

Monday, January 18: Charlie, Maria Elena, Soli, Lia, Margaret Mungovan, Kay Schwenger and Ann Marie Mathis picked me up at the airport. I was glad to see them all because I was tired from yesterday. We came to San Luis. Joanne was here. Later Carol Wolforst, Ann Curtis and Anne Gleeson came in after a few days' trip to the ocean. Carol and Ann were not here the last time I was here. It is good to find them doing so well — notwithstanding the deep adjustment they are called to make. The same goes for Charlie; he seems

great. I am very anxious to speak with everyone.

Tuesday, January 19: I spent the afternoon and evening at Huanmachuco. Had a long talk with Tom Henehan, Terry Cambias and Charlie — comparing notes about the Church in North and South America. Some similarities are a swing to the right, the ministerial and vocational picture and the search for ways to be immersed in without being of the world.

Had an excellent talk with Charlie and Tom about the adjustment to be made by new missionaries and by the veteran missionaries who receive them. I have a sense that it has been a struggle for both, but that their goodness and maturity have made it work very well.

We had some good laughs amid the more serious conversation. I didn't laugh, but the others did when I confused a strip of chili pepper with another piece of raw vegetable and swallowed it before I knew what I was doing.

Wednesday, January 20: Celebrated Mass and prayer with Tom and Charlie. Then we went to a meeting with some of the 150 pastoral ministers of Santiago who signed a letter calling for Pinochet to step aside. It was very quiet and peaceful.

Charlie, Marg Mungovan, Jane Kenrick and I paid a courtesy call on Bishop Antonio Moreno, the vicar of the zone in which most of our people work. We spoke for over an hour, and I wish it could have been much longer. The relationship between Antonio and our folks has not been as smooth as it had been with his predecessors, and the conversation helped me understand why. We have considerably different views of the pastoral life of the Church, and I would have enjoyed explaining that more fully. We did speak of continuing the discussion next time — and only half kidding.

Lunch with Tom, Charlie and two Peruvian lay missionaries, Clark and Anna Maria who serve the Huanmachuco team. I think they would enjoy more conversation with Antonio too!

In the afternoon, Tom dropped me downtown where I met Ann Marie Mathis who took me to the Southern zone to visit Kay Schwenger, Soli, Maria Elena and Lia. We did some walking and visiting of homes in the evening, and then talked for awhile before turning in.

Thursday, January 21: Mass at 8:30 with the sisters and after that a wonderful, long breakfast at a picnic beach in the back yard. The novices were not at all shy with their questions, and I tried to respond to them as fully and honestly as I could. I think we are good friends. I know that I find them most delightful. It seems to me that credit is due at least in part to Kay, Ann Marie and all of the sisters for creating an environment in which people can really talk to one another.

Took a long walk with several home visits before lunch, then had some songs after lunch. Then I went to the city with Marie Elena, where I met Ann Curtis who took me back to San Luis. I will be glad when I get home to tell Ann's friends how very well she is doing.

Quiet evening in the house. Marg, Carol and I talked for quite awhile. Joanne was later than expected returning from the coast. Someone on the retreat group she was with sprained her knee.

Friday, January 22: Today was a full one. We (all the Mercy-sisters, Charlie, Tom and I)

gathered for a reflection session at San Luis at three. It was wide-ranging and very interesting. We talked about much of what Tom, Terry, Charlie and I spoke about the other night. Added items were pastoral letters on economy; peace and the concerns of women; the Chilean experience of the Graced History Assembly; the relationships of missionaries to the local churches from which they come and in which they serve.

We celebrated the Eucharist at 7. Once again it celebrated my jubilee and, as in Brazil, I felt deeply supported by the kind words and affection of dear friends. Each person anointed me and blessed me at the end of the liturgy.

The day wasn't over yet! We had a wonderful dinner together at La Eremita. There was music and dance, and the company of a wedding reception. We had a wonderful time and didn't leave the place until nearly 1 a.m. It was a joy to be with such people when all were so obviously enjoying themselves.

When the party was over I came to Santa Monica to stay with Jane Kenrick, Maria Inez and Lydia.

Saturday, January 23: No one was in a great hurry to move this morning. We started with Mass together and then spent some time talking about the wonderful day we had yesterday. I enjoyed getting acquainted with Marie Inez, who will enter the novitiate in March, and with Lydia, who is staying with Jane as a step toward deciding whether or not she might have a vocation to religious life. We were joined later by Alexandra, who is also interested but undecided. Through the day we visited the families of all three. And in between times, Joanne took me to visit the woman who had sprained her knee on retreat.

After all the visiting, we had a late supper of pizza, and I had my first game of Uno with Maria Inez, Jane and Lydia. Guess who came in last!

Sunday, January 24: Eucharist was celebrated at Huanmachuco in one of the chapels served by Charlie. Their custom is to begin with the people speaking about their experience of the week. A mother spoke about a sick son and a lack of money for a necessary operation. Another woman thanked the community for providing food and clothing to those in special need. Still another searched for ways to revitalize respect for others. Such speakers give you something of their life when they do that. I know they offered me a great gift.

A drive to the Maryknoll Center House for lunch with Charlie and then back to San Luis. I packed and spent the rest of the afternoon with all of the sisters who gathered there to say goodbye.

At 7 p.m. Charlie, Jane, Ann Curtis and Carol took me to the airport. We had a drink together and said goodbye.

January 25: Atlanta Airport: Have just finished reviewing these notes as they call my flight to Rochester. As I went through them, I was much aware of much that is not recorded here: long conversations and walks and more personal exchanges, but most of all the strength and spirit of our missionaries. They are people of whom we can be deeply proud. They extend the life of our local Church and do much to strengthen it.

Peace to all.

