

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday    Cycle C    October 17, 2010

It is August 5, 2010. Deep in the San Jose (the Saint Joseph) copper and gold mine, in northern Chile. Miners at work, about to come to the surface for a break. Then, 700,000 tons of rock collapse into the main mine shaft. There is no escape route. 33 miners are entombed, almost a half below the surface. Each man has only a 48-hour supply of food.

A day passes, then two. There is no contact from above, and no way to know when—or if—rescuers would ever find them. Miners pray, some for the first time in their lives. Jesus taught, “Pray without becoming weary! Be like a brave little widow who is bold enough to ask an unjust judge to give her what she needs!

It is August 10, day Five. Each man receives a capful of meat or fish every 48 hours. Tempers flare; shift leader Luis Urzua separate the miners into groups of three to prevent fistfights.

Like Moses on the battlefield, some of the men lift their arms to the heavens in prayer, but others perhaps curse God: “God doesn’t hear our prayers! We are all going to die in this hole!” Jimmy Sanchez is the most frightened. He is just 19, and has been a miner only five months.

It is now August 18—thirteen days under 700,000 tons of rock. No contact from the surface. Jose Enriquez is 54, a miner for 33 years. He is also a preacher. Enriquez has become the pastor of the 32. He leads daily prayers. Enriquez shouts “Do not grow weary of

prayer! Prayer can move mountains! It can move the mountain above us!”

On August 19, the 4” drill is so close the miners can hear and feel it. But they cannot contact the drill and it misses their area.

When Moses lifted up his arms toward the heavens, his army had the better of the fight. At least some of the miners continue to believe and pray.

On August 22—17 days after the mine collapse—rescuers hear tapping on the drill head. And on the drill a note: “we are fine in the shelter, 33 of us.”

The next day, food, water, and medicines are lowered in tiny amounts. On September 2, the miners receive rosaries blessed by Pope Benedict. By September 8, a miniature projector has been lowered, and the miners enjoy a football game. On the Chilean players’ T-shirts they can read these words: “fuerza mineros” (“miners, be strong!”) On October 9, the big drill breaks through. Every man is rescued. At least one of them drops to his knees, blessing himself in prayer.

I am well aware that not everyone’s prayer is answered, and I would never suggest that they lacked faith, or didn’t pray hard or long enough. This is all very mysterious. People prayed a long time for Matt Maupin.

But what if those miners and their families had given up begging God on day 5, or day 12? What if they had grown weary by

day 15? Who knows? Is heaven like a warehouse full of blessings that no one has asked for? Who knows?

“Fuerzo mineros!” Be strong, miners! Be strong, worried parents! Be strong, struggling youth! Be strong, unemployed! Be strong if you have cancer! Perhaps it is day 16! Perhaps the Big Drill is about to break through!