



God and Faith Sustained the Chilean Miners

When 33 men remain trapped in a Chilean mine for more than two months, but appear to be unharmed and healthy upon their rescue, one has to ask if such a feat confirms the existence of God. For the rescued miners, it certainly does.

The *Catholic Herald* writes, "It has been a 'miracle', many say; first that they were not killed, second that they were found, and now a miracle of human skill and ingenuity that they have so far come up safe and unharmed; please God this 'miracle' continues to the end of an amazing story. "



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Frightened by the potential dangers they faced, the miners turned to their faith for comfort. According to the *Catholic Herald*, "The 33 miners trapped in the San Jose mine in Atacama, Chile, have requested that statues and religious pictures be sent down to them as they wait to be rescued. "

Chilean's Minister of Health, Jaime Manalich, explained, "Although a crucifix has already been sent down, the miners are continuing to request more statues of Mary and the saints to construct a makeshift chapel. The miners want to set up a section of the chamber they are in as a shrine."

In addition to that, Chile's President Sebastian Pinera placed a statue of St. Lorenzo, the patron of miners, in his presidential palace.

Families gathered around the mine and set up camp to be near their loved ones trapped thousands of feet below. The campsite, dubbed "Camp Hope," was the scene of intense fellowship and spirituality, as relatives prayed nearly around the clock for their men.

Daniel Marin, a family friend, sat on a stool and wrote a letter to the miners "to express his solidarity and his faith in God," reports Reuters.

Reuters wrote of Marin, "He was in bittersweet mood — joyful about the miracle he was part of, but reluctant to leave a place he feels is now imbued with a sense of the divine."

While underground, 63-year-old Mario Gomez became the men's spiritual leader, often leading the men in prayer, reports *Episcopal Life*. Gomez was the ninth miner to be rescued from the mine, and upon reaching safe ground, immediately dropped to his knees in prayer, even before embracing his wife.

The first man to emerge from the mine was Florencio Avalos. Avalos' wife, Monica, called the rescue a miracle. "We are really religious, both my husband and I, so God was always present. It is a miracle, this rescue was so difficult; it's a grand miracle."

Miner Mario Sepulveda described the sentiments of the miners underground: "We never lost faith. We knew we would be rescued."

Sepulveda, the second miner to be freed, said, "I have been with God and I've been with the devil.... I seized the hand of God. I always knew God would get us out of there."



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 15, 2010

Estaban Rojas, 44, promised his wife of 25 years a Catholic Church wedding when he was freed. When he reached the surface, he dropped to his knees, made the sign of the cross, and prayed with his wife.

Many of the miners utilized the small device they had underground to communicate with their religious leaders. After the rescue, several of the miners expressed their hopes to unite with the preachers who helped them retain their hopes.

Miner Jose Henriquez said he hopes to meet the pastor who helped keep his hopes alive: Marcelo Leiva. *United Press International* reports that the rescue of all 33 miners prompted “thousands of Chileans [to flock] to churches across the country” to give thanksgiving prayers.

Likewise, physicians and psychologists were surprised by the condition of the men as they emerged from the mine. Dr. Jorge Montes of the Copiapo Regional Hospital explained, “All of them have been subjected to high levels of stress and most of them have tolerated it in a truly exceptional way. We don’t see any problems of a psychological or a medical nature.”

Manalich responded to the doctor’s report, “We were completely surprised. We called this a real miracle, because any effort we would have made doesn’t explain the health condition these people have today.”

The miners and their loved ones who were sustained by spirituality and faith throughout this harrowing ordeal, were less surprised than others, however, as they attribute the story’s happy ending to God.

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Photo of rescued miner: AP Images



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