

Happy Endings

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
Upon those who dwelt in gloom a light has shone. (Isaiah 9:1)*

Who could forget the drama which took place in Chile a few months ago? Thirty-three miners had been trapped underground, and people feared that they had died. When it was discovered that they were alive, despair gave way to hope. News of the miracle shot around the world, and millions of people became vitally interested in the well-being of thirty-three men whom they did not know, and the eyes of the world were seemingly fixed on the Chilean desert – a place which must have seemed, to some, like the edge of the world.

Interest sparked concern, as people from all over the world got involved in a heroic quest to save the miners. People of different religions joined together in prayer, seemingly sheltering the men in a world-wide embrace of love. Love stronger than death poured in from all over the world, disguised under many other forms: cold hard cash, technical expertise, elbow-grease, and drills stronger than a would-be underground tomb. When at last the time for a rescue was at hand, six men laid their very lives on the line, going down into the pit to shepherd the miners from death to life.

One by one, the miners were raised to the surface and emerged from the rescue capsule to a seismic eruption of joy heard all over the world. We all watched transfixed, our emotion evident in the enormous lump lodged in our throats, and in the fountains of tears which our eyes had become. The miners' eyes, after months of darkness, needed the protection of dark glasses lest they be blinded by the unaccustomed light. Yet bathed in dangerous light they were, for such were the requirements of the video cameras: after all, inquiring minds want to know! There was talk of book and movie deals; one wondered if the formerly anonymous miners would ever again know a moment's peace! Would the attention which saved their lives now become a threat? Is it because I am pessimistically Ukrainian that I see the cloud behind every silver lining?

Turn back the clock two thousand years to another cave in another backwater – this one in Bethlehem. The Nativity Icon shows Jesus lying in the womb of the earth, having been born in a dark cave. Yet He needs no light, for He Himself is the Light of the world, dispersing the darkness which afflicts all of humanity. As we read in the Gospel according to John, "I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me should not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). His light guides us not only to Him, but to one another: when we love one another enough to abandon our selfishness, instead giving of ourselves in order to care for others, it is then that His Light shines forth in us. Is this not the parable to be found in the world's response to the miners' fate? Would that our actions always shone forth so brightly!

In the afterglow of the Chilean miracle, it is easy to forget that mining is a dirty business, as was the rescue. The words of Isaiah can apply not only to the miners and the rescuers, but to Jesus in His dealings with humanity: "There was in Him no stately bearing to make us look at Him, nor appearance that would attract us to Him" (Isaiah

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53:2). Some of His contemporaries would choose not to recognize Him, while others would try to extinguish His light lest it reveal their own darkness; King Herod would be only the first of many such. The icon is full of foreboding. Is the cave of Bethlehem not reminiscent of the tomb where Jesus would be laid? Do the swaddling clothes not remind us of the shroud? Does the manger not take the form of a sarcophagus? Such is the price which Jesus accepted when He chose to get mixed up in the dirty business which is human history.

Many saw the Star of Bethlehem without heeding it. Many heard Jesus without listening, many walked with Him without recognizing Him as the Way, many touched Him without letting their hearts be touched. May we not be like them! He is among us, present and powerful. Every once in a while, His presence and power break through in an unmistakable way. Perhaps the miracle of the Chilean miners, along with the love and care and cooperation which made it possible, can be recognized as such a breakthrough. Let us recognize Him where He chooses to be found – in Bethlehem, in Chile, in the midst of our lives – and join in a rollicking carol: “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op