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BISHOP DOLAN'S MEXICO TRIP JOURNAL

Monday, June 11th was a busy day packing and preparing for my annual trip to Mexico. I always feel the impetus to get *somewhat* caught up on my work before departing. It makes for an exhausting day or two, but I always hope to rest on the road, or when I get there.

Tuesday's early morning departure for Houston and Mexico City was hardly restful, but the trip was a good one, and we made record time leaving the Mexican metropolis. I was glad to see **Father Siordia** again, and we caught up on news, and discussed the arrangements for the week.

Wednesday's St. Anthony Feast saw us up and on the road early, heading toward the volcano (you couldn't miss it) Popocatepetl and **San Antonio Alpanocan**. The town was also stirring early to receive the bishop with a speech, a band, firecrackers and a procession leading to the church. "Popo" was sleeping in that morning. There had been many tremors and even ash of late, and one village has been evacuated.



His Excellency Bishop Dolan is assisted by Father Hernán Vergara and Father Jamie Siordia at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Dos Rios (Vera Cruz state) during the confirmation ceremony.



The ancient church of San Antonio Alpanocan.

Father Marcelo Cohetero (ordained at St. Gertrude twenty years ago) and two of his priests, impressive and pious young men, were in town to help with the Fiesta, and with its many Masses (some solemn high), Vespers

and processions. (There were also bands, a dance, and thousands of dollars of fireworks). There were at least twenty First Communicants, all in white, holding white flowers, standing or kneeling throughout the Mass, for the few pews in the ancient colonial church (I saw the date 1600 on one of the walls) had been removed. I make a go at the three short sermons of the morning, but it takes a day or two to get the hang of the Spanish again.

Organizing the over one hundred thirty-some confirmations was a challenge, as the cards with the names had to be distributed, but the names were in Latin. Several people were calling out "Joseph" or "Joannes," but no one recognized the name, as they were waiting for "Jose" or "Juan." The names ran the gamut, from Apollinaris and Prisca to Elvis and Jasmine. (The latter sort are Christianized by the confirming bishop.) At some point even the mayor got involved, but things sorted themselves out.

On Thursday **Father Hernán Vergara** with **Father Martin Gomez** came to drive me to Dos Rios in Veracruz state. As is customary, we divided the four hour trip in Tepeaca to see the Little Baby Doctor Jesus, now enshrined over the high altar in the newly gold leafed church. The face of the miraculous image may be seen on closed circuit television, and is said to change according to the circumstances. He seemed happy to us, and received our many prayers for you all.

The second volcano in two days entailed a steep mountain crossing, but the weather was fine. I was edified in Orizaba, where I spent the night, to see how many people, even the young, cross themselves when passing a church. On the other hand genuflecting seems largely ignored, even by our own people. I preached twice during this trip on the salutary lesson of St. Anthony and the donkey that knelt before the Blessed Sacrament. I hope they remember!

Another interesting custom that has arisen, perhaps due to the great poverty of this land, that someone undertakes to pray the rosary for the dead – but for a fee! There is even a keen competition for the job, whose price is negotiated in advance. Perhaps this is the Mexican equivalent of the medieval English beadsman, “one who is paid to pray for his benefactors.”

All was as expected in **Dos Rios**. The “oompah” of the band, heard at a distance, begins the “Recibimiento” ceremony, which includes copious quantities of confetti and a wreath of flowers for the bishop, to say nothing of the boys dancing with real machetes. **Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church** is unfinished, but the sanctuary gleams for the Mass. The girls’ choir gives its own unique indigenous interpretation of the Missa de Angelis, delivered in

deep tones and with great devotion. Twenty confirmations concluded the morning’s ceremonies. Some kind lady, (such as we have here, too) sends in an especially tasty lunch to fortify us for the long drive back to **Cocoyoc**. Tummy problems that night!



Sunday Mass and about seventy-five confirmations at **Our Lord of the Expiration** concluded my pastoral visit. One feature this year was the number of priests with whom I was able to visit at length; always an excellent thing. I think that five or six more will be joining us. Theirs is a hard, isolated life, demanding many sacrifices, and exposed to so many temptations. I am happy to help them in any way possible.

My last night was a brief one, with every type of bug, brought on by the rains, besetting me. But I didn’t doze on the way to Mexico City. Father Siordia’s “tales of the supernatural” keep me wide-awake! Besides, I figured I could always rest when I got home...

