



FRIENDS

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

February 2021



Fr. John Prochaska and Fr. Greg Chauvin during Christmas gift-giving for the children

Filled with Thanksgiving

Dear Friends,

Fr. John Prochaska of the Diocese of Oakland, California, has been with the St. James Society since February 2016. His five-year term with us is now coming to an end and he is preparing to return to his Diocese in February. Fr. John served with the St. James Society high in the Peruvian Andes, in the Parish of Toccoyo, which is 13,000 ft above sea level. He also served as Vicar General of the Diocese, alongside Bishop Pedro Bustamante. He reflects with us on his time in Peru:

As I prepare myself to leave Peru after five years of ministry here, I am filled with thanksgiving: thanksgiving to God for the blessing to be here; thanksgiving to the Society of St. James and the Diocese of Sicuani for the opportunity; thanksgiving to Bishop Michael Barber of the Diocese of Oakland for giving me permission that not all priests receive from their bishops (and for extending my stay in Peru from three to five years); thanksgiving for the Peruvians I have served during these years and their hospitality; thanksgiving for the opportunity to know their lives and culture; thanksgiving for the opportunity to visit some of the beautiful places of Perú, including a journey

Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor in Latin America since 1958.

on the Inca Trail; and thanksgiving to you, our Friends and benefactors who have so generously supported me in my ministry through your donations and prayers.

The opportunity to live in the Andes of Peru has been a tremendous blessing for me, in my life and relationship with God and God's people. Prior to coming to Peru, I had never lived outside of the state of California, though I had had the blessing of being able to travel to various parts of the world.

I will probably suffer more cultural shock returning to my home diocese in California than what I initially experienced



upon arrival in Peru. After living at 13,000 feet in a small town in the middle of ranch land with the closest city almost twenty miles away, I will be returning to a large city at sea level with an abundance of traffic and noise. Thanks be to God; I have always been able to adapt well to whatever circumstances I find myself in.

As we begin 2021, I pray that we will be recovering from the world pandemic and enter a renewed world. Though some will want to return to “normal”, hopefully we have seen that we need to yearn for a better than normal – for a world with greater equity and one in which we have learned that all of God's creation is connected.



Outdoor mass during the pandemic

Certainly, my ministry in most of 2020 had been quite strange, quiet, and sad as it came to a screeching halt with the COVID-19 pandemic. Churches were closed throughout Peru until November. Although the churches were closed, ministry did not stop. First of all, I don't know if I have ever spent as much time in prayer as I did from March through October. With strong restrictions about even going out to the plaza, I spent much more time in the house and in prayer.

After the first few weeks, we began a weekly Mass on the radio, which increased to daily for Holy Week. The radio is much more accessible for the people in my area where many people don't have televisions or internet. In August, I began celebrating a few home masses, outside on their patios, especially memorial masses for their deceased loved ones.



In May, we finally received permission to resume our parish ministry of feeding the seniors. We began delivering hot food to them a couple of days a week at their homes. Then, in July, they were able to resume going to the Senior Center to be with one another and receive their food – though they still have to remain outside. Through the generous donations from all of you, we received funds to distribute food baskets to the seniors and poor families who have been terribly hit by the



pandemic.

The children have also suffered through the pandemic, especially through the loss of school.

The state of emergency began the very week classes were to begin in March, and only in the last 6 weeks of the school year did some children go once or twice a week into the school. (The school year here is March through December.) The government made teachings available on the radio, TV, and internet, but personal connection to a teacher was lacking for

the children. The exception to this was for those children who attended private school or perhaps, in larger cities, there were other options. The children who live on the ranches are usually taking care of the sheep and alpaca, and lost not only their education, but their connection with their friends. We expanded our Christmas gift-giving to the children who have suffered, again in appreciation of your generosity. Before the children received their gifts, we offered the gift of prayer to Jesus. This is the translation of the prayer which appears in Spanish on the back page:

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER FOR CHILDREN:

O child Jesus, we thank you for your love to us here in the Andes. We thank you for your birth as our Savior.

You are the most precious gift of Christmas. O Jesus, as your mother Mary received you into her womb and life, help us to receive you every day into our hearts. Amen.



It was a bit sad that in my last year I could not celebrate the sacraments and fiestas with the people I have come to know over the past five years. Thanks be to God; we were able to have Christmas Masses in the various communities.

Another blessing is that Fr. Greg Chauvin from the diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, has arrived to take my place so the parish won't be without a priest as it was when I arrived here five years ago. Please pray for him that he might be able to adapt well to the high altitude and extreme cold weather. Living at such a high altitude is not easy and it poses great challenges. I'm sure Fr. Greg will be introduced to you all in a future edition of the Friends Newsletter.



Finally, for those of you who have been following the priests of the Society that have served in Sicuani, last October, Pope Francis changed its designation from a Prelature to a Diocese. Once the pandemic is over, the people of the Diocese of Sicuani will celebrate.

May the Peace and Joy of Christ be with you in this new year of 2021.

Sincerely, Fr. John Prochaska





Fr. John on the Inca Trail (ruins of Machu Picchu in background)

Sincere thanks to Fr. John for reflecting with us on his time in Peru. We are grateful for his time with us, and we are sorry to see him go. I know he will be dearly missed by Bishop Pedro, the priests and people of the Diocese of Sicuani, but perhaps especially by the people in the parish of Tocroyo where he served with total dedication and commitment for the last five years. We wish him every blessing on his return to his home diocese in Oakland, California.

We are also grateful to Bishop Michael Barber and the Diocese of Oakland for allowing Fr. John to realize his dream of spending time with us in Peru as a diocesan priest missionary. Please continue to pray for all of us in the St. James Society. Pray especially that more priests, like Fr. John, will volunteer five years of their priesthood in service of the poorest of the poor in Peru.

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

Rev. David Costello
Director



A CHRISTMAS PRAYER FOR CHILDREN

UNA ORACION DE NAVIDAD PARA NIÑOS

○ Niño Jesús, te damos gracias por tu amor a nosotros aquí en los Andes. Te damos gracias por tu nacimiento como nuestro Salvador. Eres lo más preciosísimo regalo de Navidad.

○ Jesús, como tu madre María te recibió en su vientre y vida, ayúdanos recibirte en nuestros corazones todos los días. AMEN.



Feliz Navidad • Merry Christmas
Allin Kusikuy Yayaq Paqarimunin

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