

7-19-12

One great event in the history of San Antonio de Rancho Alto took place miles from here, in the cathedral of Ambato, in the south of Ecuador. On June 29, the first priest from our parish, Fernando Diaz, was ordained there. For most of his life Fernando grew up here. For years his mother used to serve a meal for years at "break time" in "Fe y Alegría", our program for those who have not finished high school. Two years ago a death in the family forced them to move down south, but they continued their ties here.

Here there is a kind of Church relationship which we don't have in the U.S. The Sisters of Providence sponsor seminarians, who after ordination become attached to their congregation in a way that is new to me. The newly ordained has to spend at least five years where the Diocese of Ambato sends him. After that he can be assigned to work in an institution or parish where the Sisters of Providence work, but in the Diocese of Ambato. So his ordination day is a day of rejoicing for the Sisters. Fernando had asked me to be his "padrino" – sponsor, guide, - and I'd talked to him at times. I had gone down to Amabato in December for his deacon ordination, and had helped put in the deacon's vestment. Because Fernando has been sponsored by the Sisters of Providence, there were many Sisters there whom I have known here, either as postulants across the street, or working in Rancho Alto. It is always good to see them.

Because of new traffic control rules in Quito, our handyman Victor, his wife Rosa, and I had to leave here at 5:30 AM and drive down to Ambato for three hours. We got there early, so we went to the home in a small town nearby where Victor grew up, and met his mother – almost 100 – and his two sisters.. Then we went to the cathedral.

The ordination was a moving experience for me, and for everybody from our parish, many of whom came. Four men were ordained, but only three had padrinos. There were 50 priests there. Everybody seemed to know who I was, and went out of their way to help me feel at home. I spent most of the ceremony sitting next to Fernando, right outside the sanctuary. After the imposition of hands by the bishop I helped put on the chasuble, then we all went into the sanctuary to concelebrate the rest of Mass. The music was great. The whole ceremony was uplifting.

Unfortunately the three of us had very little time after Mass to talk very long with everybody, because we had to get back to Quito by 4:00 because of the new traffic rules. But we did manage to at least say hello to the family and everybody from Rancho Alto. It was a great day, a permanent memory.

Almost immediately after the ordination, because of the traffic control rules in Quito, we had to leave for Quito. Then I made a quick trip up there. In the spring I had scheduled a mission appeal at St. Isidore's in Bloomingdale, expecting the ordination date to be in May or early June. I didn't want to miss either the ordination or the appeal, so when I learned the ordination date, I made airline arrangements to be able to do both, which meant I had to leave at midnight. The trip was less than a week. I had to come back because Paddy had left for Ireland, till Sept. 11.

I got to Bloomingdale in time for the two evening Saturday evening Masses, then stayed overnight and made eight more appeals the next day. It is a huge parish, the second largest in the state. They have two Spanish Masses. I began to feel the heat, going from the church to the chapel.

All told, I had only 5 ½ days home. I was almost totally occupied with Quito stuff. After the appeal I met with Quito Barrio Outreach, with Marmion – due to come the next week – and with Dr. Colin Sumida, who heads the medical mission coming here at the end of July. I also met with the leaders of the Spanish-speaking group at Our Lady of Mercy, where I stay, had a Bible class with them and a home Mass in Spanish.

All the time Chicago had, for five days, a temperature of about 100°. The air conditioning in the room where I stay wasn't working well. Neither was the air conditioning unit in my Toyota (214,000 miles.) IT WAS HARD TO ESCAPE THE HEAT. SO I WAS KIND OF GLAD TO HAVE TO HURRY BACK FOR FERNANDO'S FIRST MASS HERE.

The very next day the youth mission from Marmion Academy came, at about 11:00 PM. Because visitors who come to this altitude – two miles high – have to get used to the thinned air, they didn't work the first day. So after morning Mass and breakfast, the daycare center Miguelito had a ceremony of welcome. Then the Marmion youths went to the grounds and classrooms of the nearby public school Aleman, where our Rancho Alto teens and young adults – headed by our newly elected barrio queen, a catechist, and a former YCS student of mine, had arranged a two-week summer school of creativity. About 30 of our young people had sessions in different places: about art, music, history, drama, home skills, etc. It was fantastic. I was proud of those who put it on. After their experience at this summer event, Carlos Maldonado showed the education center to the Marmion group, then walked them through town, down to the clinic and the soup kitchen, where they ate lunch. Unfortunately the school year had just ended and the Marmion youths could not interact with the school kids down here. Before lunch, I had shown them our house and talked about the Church in South America.

This group had a skill of arranging prayer and sharing sessions every evening, so as often as possible I went up there to be with them after the Masses down here, to participate and receive. All week long they related very well to the people here, both with the very young and the adults. It was great.

Wednesday to Saturday, when it wasn't raining, they worked on replacing the tiles on the roofs of two rooms in the daycare center. The new tiles will let in more sunlight and heat. On Saturday Carmen Tapia, head of the daycare center, with her two daughters treated us to lunch at her house. On Sunday, after Mass and after a short stay at a "clausura", the end of the school year for those studying for a high school diploma, they went with Carlos to the Mitad del Mundo, then to the town center where they saw some beautiful churches and then to the artists' square, where they bought mementos. On Monday they treated the Miguelito kids to an outing on a farm near the town of Tumbaco. They left very early on Tuesday morning,

leaving many gifts of clothes and artists' supplies for young people. As I said, all week long they related especially well to everybody here. Their whole visit sent me sky high.

The one not-so-good thing about this mission visit was that one of the young men wasn't able to handle the high altitude, and we first had to bring him down to our clinic here, then to the Hospital San José Obrero, then to another clinic where there was a specialist in altitude sickness. He had to stay there most of the week, and so missed almost all of a great experience. The adults on the Marmion team took turns staying with him overnight in that clinic, not wanting him to be alone in a different country with a different language.

One event that took place during their visit which I was not able to attend was the graduation of 16 of our students in "Fe y Alegría". After six years of study, every Sunday for six hours, they received a high school diploma from the official education ministry. We are not on our own in this program; it is regulated by the board of education, so the final ceremony had to be in the city, together with other programs. I had planned to go because the ceremony was scheduled for 10:00 AM, but on the day before they changed it to 4:00 PM, making it impossible for me to attend. I would have enjoyed it. Some of the graduates came to our event on Saturday and we applauded them.

Now I will describe the last big happening. The people at Rancho Alto have always celebrated on Saturday night with the groups who came down and lived in the places here: St. Thomas, St. Elizabeth Seton, Marmion, Holy Spirit, Joliet medical and construction teams. I knew that they would do so for Marmion again as well. But I knew there would be other things at the Mass in the chapel San Antonio: two Baptisms, one quinciniera, a blessing of a ring, a congratulations to those adults in "Fe y Alegría" who had graduated with a high school diploma that day, besides the "thank you" to Marmion. Sister Rosa had told me that there would be something said about my tenth anniversary as a missionary (I left the U.S. to be a foreign missionary on July 16, 2002.) But I hadn't thought much about it, because there were so many other things to celebrate. The Mass went on as one would expect with all those things to do. The chapel San Antonio was packed. I wasn't expecting anything too unusual. Then after Communion I saw a huge picture of me on the wall, which I hadn't noticed. Then they set up a power point, i.e., a slide show, about things I have accomplished here: clinic, soup kitchen, education center, Miguelito, things in Mirador, in the chapel. They put up some of my usual sayings, and some of my goofy sayings. Then people talked and thanked me.

Then after Mass the outside show began. There must have been ten music groups. Yaware came back, with Juan and his beautiful voice; a mariachi band; Riocío Macancela and her Loyola traditional dance group; the AfroEcuadorians; our own youth dancers; then our youth combined with Marmion kids; then Marmion by itself, some singers from Mirador; skits. It went on for a long time, with constant opportunities for everyone to dance. There were gifts for me and again words of thanks. I felt appreciated and loved. It was a blast, a great community effort.

Next week a medical mission sponsored by Quito Barrio Outreach will be here. Today Victor and his daughter Vickie went through different neighborhoods, announcing the mission by loudspeaker from my car.

Next time I will write about this mission, and what else is happening. Thank you for your constant love and support. Fr. Don