Tom Lynch's and Jim Spahn's
First Impressions of Bolivia

We have now been in Bolivia a little over four months and are slowly adjusting to the differences in seasons (it's the middle of Spring here), food (lots of chicken, rice and potatoes), pace (a three hour siesta is expected!), and efficiency (the "German" in Jim and Tom is having a stroke!).

We are down in our Vicariate to help them move toward more complete independence. We are helping by serving in positions in formation that cannot yet be filled by Bolivians. Tom Lynch, O.P. is going to serve as Assistant Director of Pre-Novices, and Jim Spahn, O.P. is going to serve as Director of Students. Both of us are going to be living in Cochabamba, but eventually in different houses. So far it has been frustrating in many ways, however, it is also exciting to know that we are part of building up a new foundation of the Order.

We have been living in the Casa de San Judas Tadeo, the Studium house of our Vicariate. We are living with Pat Rearden, O.P., the Vicar Provincial, Mark Paraday, O.P., the house superior, Rolando Villavicencio, O.P., the director of the Centro San Martin located next door, and 10 Dominican students.

We are participating in a four month long Curso de Formadores along with the future Directors of Pre-Novices, Clemente Aguayo, O.P. and forty-six other religious. The course is based in Cochabamba, organized to train new formators from all over Latin America in their new jobs. It is quite intensive (6 ¸ hours a day, five days a week) and includes training in spirituality, the economic-political reality, psychology, anthropology, Church social doctrine, and (most important of all for Tom and Jim) language skills. Our language training has been put to the test as we try to hear, understand, and be understood in Spanish. The variety of accents and dialects from all over Latin America is (literally) mind boggling. We come home exhausted! The course will end in early December.

On weekends, we take turns helping out in three different locales. One is the Hogar St. Martin, a ministry of the Centro San Martin, which is a home for street kids and orphans. Their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn is delightful. The other two places we celebrate Eucharist on weekends are a couple of neighboring parishes in the city. One of these parishes is quite poor and the other is more middle-class. Tom occasionally celebrates Eucharist at the foot of the huge Christ statue which overlooks the city.

Centro San Martin is the charismatic ministry center next door which involves several of the Dominicans in the Vicariate. It offers a refreshing, lively change from the often dull and lifeless liturgies we have discovered around the city. Various ministries are carried out through the Center including a food pantry, medical clinic, library, and various prayer groups.

The students are excellent men, though some are having trouble with their studies. Several of them work on weekends in poor barrios outside of the city. They all get experience preaching and leading worship services, and serving the poor in many ways. They are eager to learn and live Dominican life and are very warm and welcoming. We have started a "vocational Mass" on Fridays in the house, for university students who might be interested in religious life. Jim is the usual celeberant. It is a bit more informal and intimate. Many of the Dominican students attend, and there are usually visitors who are invited to have supper with us afterwards.

Healthwise, we have both done pretty well, though Jim had a bout of stress-related intestinal distress. "It felt like someone had yanked out my intestines and stared twisting them" the related after the antibiotics cleared things up. Tom (who seems to have a stomach of iron) hasn't yet succumbed, but Jim is waiting.

We must confess to a bit of homesickness, but the fraternity of the brothers here and the letters from the States help alleviate this. We are both anxious to return in June to see you and to hare our experiences with you all at the Assembly.

Please remember your brothers in the Vicariate in your daily prayers. There are many problems that need to be surmounted before the goal of becoming a Vice-Province is realized, so we definitely need your prayers. If you wish, you can write to us at:

Dominicos
Casilla 1239
Cochabamba, Bolivia

Fraternally,
Tom Lynch, O.P. and Jim Spahn, O.P.

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