

May 29, 1979
3122 Savoy Drive
Fairfax, VA 22031

Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, O.P.
Secretary NCCB/USCC
1312 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Bishop Kelly,

This is to inform you of the events surrounding the Argentine Military mass held at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington DC on Friday, May 25, 1979. Since we feel accountability is "a two way street", we want to let you know of some of the background and side-lights of what happened before, during and after approximately 350 dignitaries and officers and their wives walked out of St. Matthew's leaving Rev. Sean O'Malley preaching a homily about the Pope, Puebla and "Rachael crying to Roma (Rama) for her lost children".

While we were writing to you, sending copies of our letter to Cardinal Baum, Bishop Marino, and Archbishop Jadot, we and others were dialoguing with Bishop Marino. Some people went to Fr. O'Malley to speak about the situation in Argentina. They asked him to (1) refuse to say the mass, or (2) say the mass for the freedom of Thelma de Cabezas, or (3) say the mass with a firm position.

The day before the scheduled Argentine Mass, one woman attended a mass presided by Cardinal Baum; afterwards she spoke with him about the necessity to cancel the mass, but he grabbed her hands and said, "It is following the lead of the hierarchy in Argentina." "Listen to Sean O'Malley's sermon." "You have a saint in Father Sean O'Malley!"

Because Fr. O'Malley's previous sermons in the past two years had been "carefully balanced", they had resulted in ambiguities and were interpreted as mediocrities.

A quickly gathered "Coalition of Christians Concerned For Justice in Argentina" sewed brown hoods, stenciled prison numbers across the "face" of the hoods, made signs with names of disappeared, made banners on bed sheets, drew up flyers and took them to sympathetic printers for reproduction at cost, etc.

Again, just before the mass started, Fr. Rice went to talk with Fr. O'Malley as he vested in the sacristy. Fr. Rice, who has worked for years in Argentina as a Little Brother of the Gospel and was imprisoned and tortured in Buenos Aires, expressed to Fr. O'Malley the term "Sacrilege" to use a mass for an evil purpose, to cover up attacks on human persons as was being done by the Argentine Embassy. Fr. Rice told Fr. O'Malley that he would make a statement calling for reconciliation before the mass and that people would be present in the left front of the church outside the altar rail with hoods and a banner. They would stand in silence. The mass would not be interrupted.

Father Rice then left the sacristy, went to the microphone on the lector's side of the church. He said, "Good Morning. "I am a priest who was working for a number of years in Argentina, where I knew the situation very well, having suffered repression in my own body." The microphone started fluctuating but very quickly went dead. He continued: "For three years this mass has been celebrated on the 25th. We felt this year, before we could celebrate this one, there should be a process of reconciliation." With that, the organ music started at full blast. Father Rice was asked politely by Msgr. Quinn to please leave, which he did, walking the length of the church to the outside steps.

Meanwhile, in the left front side of the church, two people had unfolded a banner which said, "First, go and make peace with your brothers. The Word of God." Standing next to the banner were three hooded people holding the names of two Little Brothers of the Gospel and one French nun, all of whom disappeared two years ago in Argentina. Directly behind the first two rows of reserved seats was a row of people who then stood up with 5 hoods symbolizing the disappeared and 3 white kerchiefs standing for the women who wait for word of their children on Thursdays in the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires.

After that, things happened quite rapidly. An Argentine plain-clothes security officer stood in front of John S., blocking the people's view. The janitor asked them to leave. They shook their heads and he said, "Then I'll have to call the police". The cross-bearer ripped a sign up that had the name of one of the disappeared. John S., who had the man standing in front of him blocking the view, had his hood violently ripped off by a man standing behind him. The hooded woman standing next to him felt some of her hair being yanked out of her scalp as an Argentine violently grabbed her hood and yanked it off--following through his yank with blows to John S. At this point John S. yelled, "The blows that were struck in the dark in Argentina are now being struck here in the light."

John K., standing hooded in the third pew, was approached by another Argentine plain-clothes man who violently ripped off his hood, punching John twice in the chest. Even when receiving these blows, coalition members remained totally non-violent in word and action. The U.S. police, who had been outside even before the mass started, were there in front of the coalition members and ordered them to move out to the street, which they did.

Two of the kerchiefed women walked out the middle aisle singing aloud, "Oh, Senor, Lord have mercy on your people. Let their blood not be in vain." Lord, please change the minds and hearts of the military that are torturing their own people and are responsible for the disappeared."

Once outside the church, the U.S. police angrily told the coalition people that they had to leave the church steps and go across the street to join the people demonstrating there. They said, "You have to go join them. You have the permit for across the street." Across the street was a group of demonstrators who had come in the Argentine Embassy bus. Their signs were painted by professional sign painters. They appeared

to be people mainly unfamiliar with Washington DC type demonstrations, but walked rapidly in elongated circles shouting "Viva Argentina". One of their signs said "Argentina, Si. Cuba, no". Members of the coalition assumed some were Cuban exiles and perhaps could even be members of Omega, the terrorist group that set off a bomb blast felt all around Washington a week or so ago.

At this point Argentine officers in full dress uniform and their families started pushing together and squeezing themselves as fast as possible out both doors of the Cathedral. Fr. Sean O'Malley was left in his pulpit, preaching a homily to a near empty church. His homily spoke of the Pope and what he said when he opened the Bishop's meeting in Puebla, Mexico. He spoke of the Bishop's meeting, of the people who came asking assistance to find their missing relatives. He spoke of 13,000 missing in Argentina, of "Rachael crying to Roma (Rama) for her lost children."

Father O'Malley was vested in purple, the color of lent and repentance. He had opened his remarks with "This is not a time for celebration, but for deep thoughtful reflection." The entire main section of the Cathedral was filled with Argentine military officers and their families. The Argentine Ambassador was in the front pew. By the time Father was talking about "justice and the condemning of innocent Argentinians", they were all on their feet. As he spoke of 13,000 disappeared, they were retreating down the aisles. When he talked of some women coming to Puebla, they were crashing out the doors.

One military family remained along with one family whose father was in civilian clothes. The man in mufti later said he had stayed because he was in agreement with Sean O'Malley. The military officer, named Kelly, said later he had stayed, "to turn the other cheek".

As Father O'Malley continued the mass, most of the members of the coalition then returned to the mass and participated with the responses and received communion. The communion verse was, "Blessed are the peace-makers" in what was apparantly a votive mass for peace.

Father Rice stayed outside on the sidewalk with a few other coalition members who continued leafletting the Argentines as they milled around on the sidewalk. A group of teenagers and a few military men started verbally harrassing Fr. Rice. The officer said to him; "You are not a priest. You are a Jew. Where did you buy your collar? How much do they pay you? Dear priest, where did you study? You have your geography mixed up, you studied in Cuba."

When Fr. Rice patiently explained that he had been in Argentina and started naming some of the churches and seminaries there, the officer said, "You were in prison with the terrorists. That's what

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you studied." And then, pointing his right index finger like a gun pointed to the sky, he leered, "When you return to Argentina, we'll send you to heaven."

A nun was verbally harassed by another Argentine group as she stood wearing a white kerchief on the sidewalk. These were the people who had been across the street with the Embassy picket. They formed a threatening semi-circle around the sister but she was protected by members of the coalition.

In the church, during mass, two men had received violent blows from the Argentine security men. One woman had her hair violently yanked and is missing a patch of hair. No one is interested in prosecuting the Argentines for violent assault and bodily harm.

But we are interested in the significance of these violent actions. We are interested in the fact that since the Argentines walked out of a church mass, they just cannot come back without the Ambassador first contacting Father Sean O'Malley with some accountability as to their actions, to get them to come to terms with the oppression in their country.

We are saddened that the Argentine authorities are unwilling to face the demands for reconciliation in the Argentine people. Our prayer is that the Lord will help them reflect in their own hearts on the suffering of their brothers and sisters and guide them towards alleviating that suffering in Justice and Truth so that they can effectively reconcile themselves with the Church.

Sincerely,

Ruth M. Fitzpatrick

RUTH MCDONOUGH FITZPATRICK

Elizabeth Campbell RSM.

ELIZABETH CAMPBELL, R.S.M.

P.S. Please send this report on to the Argentine Bishops' Conference, including a copy of Coleman McCarthy's account of these incidents which will be in the Washington Post this week.

Enclosures: Leaflet, "Where Are Our Children?"
Leaflet, "Argentina One Year Later; 3-10 Disappeared Each Day"
Prayer, Father Carlos Mugica
Letter, O.C.A.A.
Testimony of Ana Maria Careaga