

A Deeper Meaning to Trapped Miners 2,000 Feet Below the Surface

By Fr. Dave Heney

We are persistent for those things, or those causes, or even more especially, those people for whom we care a great deal. This week over a billion people watched for hours as 33 Chilean miners were rescued, one by one, from a small subterranean enclosure, 2,000 feet below the surface.

From the moment they were discovered to be still alive, some seventeen days after the mine collapse, they must have wondered if anyone cared about them 2,000 feet above. Fortunately, everyone did. The miners felt that care and concern in the following two months as they received very expert help on how to prepare for their ascent. They received the proper medicine, food, and routines to follow to ensure their good health until the moment would arrive that they could ascend to the top.

Certainly, this is a great homage to human solidarity; not only in Chile, but around the world (much of the technology came from the United States). Yet, we Catholics can see something more going on here than first meets the eye.

Remember that it was the decision of those on top that determined whether these miners would live or die. Fortunately, they chose life, and to focus all of their energy, intelligence, and resources to bring them to the surface.

That decision ultimately meant that what was certainly going to be their tragic and lonely small dark tomb was instead turned into a place of hope and preparation for a healthy return to the surface so that these 33 miners could be reunited with their families. All of that work on top; all of that hope down below!

October, the month of their amazing and heroic rescue is also called “Respect Life Month” in our Catholic calendar. For those who have eyes to see a deeper meaning, their “tomb” had been slowly transformed into a kind of “womb” in which they would they would grow strong and healthy, and from which they would emerge, one by one, to greet their families.

They did not simply “return” to their families. They had changed completely while they were down there, with a new and much deeper perspective on faith and the meaning of life. Upon surfacing, each miner was truly a “newborn” person.

It was a horrible accident in early August that began this long event. But perhaps we can say that it was no accident that it came to a happy ending in October when they emerged from 2,000 feet below the surface to greet, for the first time as newborn people, their families and the whole world, and emerge profoundly grateful for those on the surface who chose life.

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