

Fr. O'Connor's Homily, January 1, 2020
The Solemnity of Mary

Happy New Year! Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God! I found this wonderful story I want to share with all of you.

On the afternoon of October 12, 1972, a chartered airplane was flying a Uruguay rugby team from Montevideo to Santiago, Chile. 45 passengers were aboard. As the plane headed over the Andes, it developed trouble. Suddenly it started to lose altitude and descended rapidly. Minutes later it crashed into deep snow and broke into several pieces. Incredibly 28 young men survived.

Some of the boys had on school jackets. Others were dressed only in short sleeves. None were dressed for the subzero weather and few suitcases with extra clothing could be found. As night closed in, the 28 survivors huddled together in a broken section of the plane.

On the eighth day, search parties from Chile, Argentina and Uruguay abandoned their efforts to locate the downed plane. The news reached the survivors over the plane radio which one of the boys had restored to operation. The crash victims now realized that if they were to survive, it would have to be on their own. In the next few days, 12 more boys died. Now there were 16 survivors.

At this point, the boys made an important decision. They decided to hold nightly prayer services in the shell of the plane. Around 9 o'clock, when the moon dropped below the mountain, they would stop all talking and one of the boys would begin the rosary.

The nightly prayer sessions became a tremendous source of strength for the boys. Some boys who weren't particularly religious began to experience a remarkable awareness of God's presence during the prayer sessions.

For example, there was a boy names Arturo. He was a rather sullen person. Even his own family found him withdrawn and hard to communicate with. One night Arturo surprised everyone by asking to lead the prayers. As he prayed he spoke with such deep feeling that the others were struck with a new affection for him. After the prayer ended, everyone was silent. Only Arturo could be heard weeping softly. "Why are your crying?" someone asked. "Because I feel so close to God," he answered.

Days inched into weeks. Finally in the 8th week, the weather began to break. Two of the strongest boys agreed to try to descend the mountain for help. The going was extremely tough. They were tied together by a nylon cord. One bad slip and both would go tumbling down the mountain. One boy began a continuous dialogue with God. He prayed the prayer of Tevye from Fiddle on the Roof. "God," he said, "You can make it tough but please don't make it impossible."

Nine days later the boys made it down. Within hours, army helicopters flew to the top of the mountain to rescue the remaining 14 boys.

The 16 boys gave much credit to Mary for helping them survive those 70 days. They had repeated the phrase, "Mary, Mother of God over 50,000 times. During those 70 days on the mountain they experienced that Mary was not only the Mother of God but their mother as well.