

El Progreso, Yoro
Honduras, C.A.
November 4, 1968

Dear Family,

May Christ's Holy Spirit of Love fill us all!

I'm back in Progreso working as usual in all the same activities as before. The only difference is that the people are more scared than ever to be in any organization like a cooperative or a labor union. But the state of siege in the country is over and we have permission to continue. There are still rumors that my enemies, the enemies of the campesino movements, are still trying to get rid of me. But it will be harder than ever for them to do so, because I now have more important friends in high places than ever before. Also the international agencies that help the campesinos are now more interested than ever in our cooperative program. So I see more good than harm coming out of the persecution I've suffered. And as for me, you all know that the happiest day of my life has been when they put me in jail in San Pedro Sula, on the floor with the rest of the prisoners. To have been a prisoner for Christ, and for His poor, is my only claim to glory. Now I feel that I am a little like Christ. And so, I can't feel anything but compassion and forgiveness for those who have talked against me with their lies. May Christ convert these enemies. They are the rich landowners and military and political people around here – but of course, not all of them.

Tom Quiery is thinking of writing up the whole story which you can read, and you know that I haven't got the patience to write it all down. In brief, what happened after I returned to Honduras from my visit with you all was this. I arrived in Progreso on Sept. 14, and didn't know anything at all about plans for a general strike of all the workers of the country in protest for an increase of 20% on many consumer goods as a Central American tax. Well, on Sept. 18 the general strike was called. Immediately the govt. declared a state of siege and began arresting all its enemies or supposed enemies, including anyone accused by anyone of being a communist suspect. At 11 p.m. that night of Sept. 18, more than 10 armed civilian-dressed men came into our priest's house to demand that Fr. Alberdi and I go with them immediately. Fr. Alberdi had left Honduras to work in Germany over 2 years ago and was only back visiting us to bless a school he helped build. Neither of us had anything to do with the strike, but were on their lists as communist agitators who had fomented the strike. They put us in the San Pedro jail for that night, and the next day in the back of a guarded truck took us to the frontier of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Fr. Alberdi went right away to San Salvador to return to Germany, because he had his passport with him. I was kept in the soldiers' quarters that night of Sept. 19, and the next day driven over to Esquipulas, Guatemala, deported without any of my papers or money, or clothes except what I had on. But I was happy, knowing that my friends had to do something to get me back. The very next day the Honduran soldiers came to ask me if I wanted to go back to Honduras, and drove me back to Ocotepeque. I was detained there for 3 days waiting for a govt. plane to take me to Tegucigalpa, where I was detained for 8 more days, in the sense that I couldn't leave Tegucigalpa. The American Ambassador, the Papal Nuncio, and the Bishop, and many other leaders had talked to the president of the republic, and I was finally given permission to return to work in Progreso.

The strike failed and things are getting back to normal, when last week a huge flood struck Progreso, completely destroying 2 villages nearby. We are feeding and sheltering over 1500 victims still. Life is interesting.

Love,
Jim