

God captured his attention

Salvatorian Patric Nikolas spent a good portion of the summer working and living in Columbia. "My desire to develop greater empathy for non-English speakers in the United States paid off, and I now understand what it feels like to be the outsider who doesn't necessarily know how or even what to communicate," he said. "It was a lonely, disorienting feeling which motivated me all the more to learn Spanish to a professionally functional degree." Though Patric made perpetual vows on August 13th, he made a point of working directly with the Latin American novices while in Columbia.

He was given the task of teaching them English twice a week, and his ministry schedule was that of a Colombian novice and very demanding: Morning classes; visits to local schools, providing catechesis, activities and Masses; travel into the inner city and participation in collaborative ministries that primarily focused on helping at-risk youth.

Weekends were filled with pastoral visits, sometimes stopping at homes and small businesses, to do catechesis, pray the rosary and visit with the people in meaningful ways. "This was serious, challenging work and we would not return home until after dark," said Patric. "About a month into the trip I accompanied the novices to a very poor parish we staff in a pueblo named San Joaquin. The work there was similar to the novitiate, except that we were 'on' all the time. Pastoral visits to homes and schools were daily." Sundays were devoted to Mass and everyone had ministries that occupied significant portions of the day.

Patric immersed himself in every aspect of their lives and as the only English speaker, did his best to communicate in Spanish. "There were many moments where God captured my attention, often through interactions with people, and sometimes through nature, prayer, or silence," he shared. "One instance that comes to mind was on Trinity Sunday. Peripheral to this time I had been praying for clarity in discernment, for I hadn't expected to love being in South America that much."

What follows is a brief excerpt from Patric's journal, describing what happened.

Day 28

*In preparation for the mission experience, today after Mass we were all encouraged to go up to the altar and choose a Scripture passage that had been written on a piece of paper shaped like a foot. Without looking at any of them, I chose the one closest to the altar, right in front of a large candle: "Miren sobre las montañas del que trae la buena noticia, del que proclama la paz" (Nah 2,1).**

Though not superstitious, I do notice circumstances under which God might be communicating something important. Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, I'm entering into the final leg of this adventure, and a message I was not trying to find affirms my dawning sense of vocation as it might pertain to Latin America. I'm in the mountains right now, the new Perú mission is also in the mountains, and I'm going to relax and let time and discernment reveal what, if anything, God intends this to mean for my priesthood.

**"Look upon the mountains of the one who brings the good news, who proclaims peace" (or "At this moment on the mountains, the footsteps of one bearing good news, of one announcing peace" NABRE).*

"My overall takeaway from the trip is that it changed my heart and mind," he said. "Though I'm fundamentally the same, a whole new missionary dimension is revealing itself as possible in the future."



Patric with his friends at the St. Peter Festival in San Joaquin.



In the mountains of Columbia, Patric reflected on what this journey may mean for his priesthood.