



A Day of Trust

The difficulties already began in Rome. (...) In Brazil I suddenly had the idea perhaps a sympathetic papal nuncio would have the authority and readiness to extend the passport? And in fact, both the nuncios of Uruguay and Chile said they would be ready to immediately give such an extension for one year. At my request and so as not to lose a single month, they wanted to wait until the end of July so that the passport would be secured until July 1949. With that said, I set out in good spirits for the United States on June 4. It was my plan to stay one month, or if necessary, to stretch out my visit until the expiration date of my passport, i.e. until the end of July, and then return to Chile to apply for the extension that had been promised me there. The flight went off without incident and the airplane landed on American soil the next day (June 5, 1948) in Miami.

I approached customs and urged for haste so that I could catch the plane to Chicago which was already boarding on time. Then I was told: the passport has already expired and is consequently invalid. I tried to prove that the contrary was true using the documents at hand. The passport was valid until July 31 and today was only June 5. It turns out that according to American law and usage, all passports are treated as having expired two months before the expiration date. Since it was already June 5, the passport had already been worthless for five days. I still have to chuckle when I look back on that situation. The officer frequently used the word canceled. I had no idea of what canceled meant and could only associate it with the word chancellor. (...) I then explained at great length which chancellor had issued the visa and that it would have been easy for me to obtain an extension of the passport from the nuncios of Chile or Uruguay and my reasons for putting it off... It was all in vain. Both sides retained their composure. The moment the situation took a turn for the worse, I prayed to myself:

*I trust your might, your kindness, O Mother dear, I do believe that you are always near.
Schoenstatt's great Queen, O Mother mild, I
blindly trust in you and in your Child.*

Since we were making no progress, however, I asked that I be taken to the consulate. Instead, two officers of Pan American Airways came to my assistance.

They called Washington and discussed the situation while I prompted them, explaining what kind of passport I had. The response was immediate. I could stay one month, but I would have to leave the country by July 5 if no official extension [of the passport] had been made by then. The following was written in my passport: Valid until July 5. My hopes nearly fell when I first saw that; then I quickly noticed that the Americans usually write the number of the month first and then the number of the day.

In the meantime, however, my plane to Chicago had long since departed. At my request the official called [the Pallottine Fathers in] Milwaukee and informed them of my new time of arrival. I offered him a tip, but he refused to take it, pointing out the medal he wore under his shirt and saying, I'm a Catholic. Another official drove me with an airline car about 15 minutes into the city to a house of the Jesuits. I stayed there until the departure of my flight which was towards evening. The official refused to accept any payment for the ride and asked instead for my blessing for himself and his family. This was my first encounter with American officials. ■