

After dark on Good Friday 1989, Louis Vitale and 10 others crossed the fence onto the test site and headed across the desert for Mercury. Arriving late at night, they waited until dawn on Holy Saturday, carrying with them a sense that they were "searching for Jesus," preoccupied with the scriptural question, "Where have they laid him?"

Vitale remembered from his days as a consultant at Mercury years before that there had been a chapel there. Trucks roaming through Mercury kept them wary as they wandered the town. The 11 finally saw the distinctive architecture of the chapel, now labeled as offices of the Los Alamos nuclear research laboratories.

They shared their qualms about the possibility of having to break into it—the front doors, they had been told, were always chained shut during non-work hours. They began to jog around the track not far from the chapel, trying to appear inconspicuous, and then, at just the right moment, "we made a break for it," says Vitale.

"We went up to the main doors. They were paneled, with turquoise inlaid in wood. And we found that they were open." They found an old pew in the vestibule, which had been turned into a locker room. They could tell where the altar had been.

"We read the passage about the women coming to the tomb and finding the stone rolled away," continues Vitale. "We thought," he says of their easy entrance, "it must have been the same angel." He adds, with a smile, "We learned later that the Los Alamos office had chosen that morning to have the carpets cleaned, and the cleaners had neglected to lock the doors behind them."

They prayed in this former chapel, located on Trinity Avenue, named for the first nuclear bomb test. They blessed and renamed the building "Holy Trinity Chapel."

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Remembering that the women in the Bible account of the resurrection had run and told the disciple Peter what they had seen, they decided to call Peter Ediger and announce that they had made it to the chapel. Ediger informed local media, and officials at the test site learned of the presence of the "intruders" while listening to a live radio interview with them.

"People started coming up the walk with automatic weapons," says Vitale. "When they got there, we saw that they were the sheriff's people. We decided to pray until they arrested us. They didn't want to arrest us until we were done praying." Vitale and friends spent three days in the Beatty jail, where he celebrated Mass using the toast from breakfast and small packets of grape jelly for "wine."

"I honestly believe," says Vitale, "that, in the end, God wins.... But part of bringing about the new creation is our effort—God gives us a part.

"The monstrous weapons of destruction to protect our empire cannot stand in the sight of God," he continues. "These too will fall. But what do we do?... We have to 'hunker down in the desert,' pulling into our deepest religious roots to see how God intends us to be and act.

"We may have a feeling of total powerlessness. But we are part of God's plan to transform the world. Sitting in that chapel, sitting on that pew, throwing a little holy water around—I knew that somehow, someday, God would triumph."

"Throughout spiritual history," says Peter Ediger, "the desert