

Drug saint lets dealer down

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 01 April 2022 04:52



A man trying to get a large amount of marijuana out of the state may have been hoping Jesus Melvarde, the “narco-saint”, would help him achieve his mission.

On March 16, around 9:36 am, Gallup Police Officer Brandon Salazar saw a white Ford Fusion following too closely to a semi-truck near the 27-mile marker on I-40 eastbound. The car was also swerving onto the shoulder of the road.

When Salazar finally pulled the car over, he met the driver, Jonathan Jairo Barragan Alejo, 25, from Clearlake Oaks, Calif. He asked the young man for his license, registration, and car insurance, which Barragan Alejo was able to provide.

The officer had the young man follow him to his patrol car and he began to write a traffic violation for Barragan Alejo. As he did so, Salazar began talking to the man and asked where he was going.

Barragan Alejo said he was on his way to visit his grandma in Tulsa, Okla., and that he was also going to be looking for work while he was there. He explained that he was planning on staying there for a month.

According to his report, Barragan Alejo appeared nervous to Salazar. Salazar noted that he was breathing very heavily.

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Salazar noticed that the registration was not in Barragan Alejo's name, so the man explained to the officer that he had had the vehicle for a few months and was in the process of buying it.

According to the report, Salazar made the connection that driving a vehicle that belongs to someone else and also driving a salvaged vehicle are things associated with drug smuggling.

Barragan Alejo explained that the car had only been driven a few times around the northern California area in the past couple months, but Salazar was able to find out through the Drug Enforcement Agency's plate reader system that the car had been used to travel on I-40 through Arizona and New Mexico multiple times in the past month.

When Salazar asked if Barragan Alejo had been traveling outside of California recently, the man could only stare at the car without saying anything.

Salazar asked Barragan Alejo if anything illegal was in the car, such as heroin, meth, cocaine, or large quantities of marijuana.

When he responded to the meth question, Barragan Alejo gave a nervous chuckle and looked back at the car before saying no. When asked about marijuana, he responded with a simple "no."

According to Salazar's report, Barragan Alejo denied his request to have the car searched, and he kept asking questions as if the car was being tracked. Salazar began to believe that the young man was involved in criminal activity, so he detained him and put him the back of his patrol car.

When Salazar took the car's keys from Barragan Alejo, he noticed a medallion on the key ring with a cross on it with the patron saint Jesus Melvarde on it.

According to Salazar, Jesus Melvarde is the "narco-saint" often worshipped by people of

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Hispanic cultures involved in criminal organizations.

After he received a warrant from the District Judge, Salazar was able to search the Ford Fusion. He found two large black trash bags full of marijuana and a suitcase which had three plastic bags of marijuana inside it in the car.

In total, Barragan Alejo had over 34 pounds of marijuana in the car. Salazar took Barragan Alejo to the McKinley County Adult Detention Center for booking. He was charged with possession of marijuana with intent to distribute.

Barragan Alejo's preliminary examination is scheduled for March 30.