

Father Bob Thames' end of March 2024 letter from Cabezas, Bolivia, follows below. Please use the [link at the end](#) of the letter for easiest access to the on-line donation page.

It is now the 2nd day of April and I'm just starting this letter. Sorry! I wanted to get Holy Week included in the letter and this only ended two days ago. Yesterday I spent all day in the city, doing some good things, so necessary. My desire for all of you now is that the most Holy and Happy time of Easter leave an impact of the Resurrection of Jesus in your lives, making you all more aware that the Life After Death for each of us be a Conscious Reality that guides our lives toward Heaven every day. May this Eternal Joy with the Holy Trinity now made possible by the Total Loving Sacrifice of Jesus make your families more loving and generous, as generous as Jesus Who Shares His Spirit of Life that was poured out from His Side Symbolized in Blood and Water. This is the Strength that makes Love Possible in our lives, Gifted by Our God, Holy Families, Real Loving Fathers and Mothers, United Husbands and Wives! This is my Prayer for you all who read this letter.

This past Holy Week was really great. Probably the most attended in most of my years in pastoral service in this area. I don't know the reason, just that people showed up, participated and returned the next day. It not in any way because of me. I was so impressed with the Stations of the Cross in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Abapó directed by an active lay woman with a strong voice. There must have been 150 to 200 or more participating in the hot sun for the 14 stations starting up the hill above the chapel and coming down, stopping at the assigned houses for the stations. I was impressed with attentiveness, listening to hear the loudspeaker helping all to hear the meditations. I came only at the end as I had another celebration in another community and arrived as the Stations ended. Then we started the Good Friday celebration in church, all the people came in and more arrived for another hour and a half. Actually, it was the same all week, from Palm Sunday with its procession, Holy Thursday with the washing of feet, Good Friday with its station of the cross, and Holy Saturday night with the procession with candles and renewal of baptismal vows. There were about 300 people each day. We have never had such a response as this year. Of course, no one knows the heart of each person, Only Our Lord! But I prayed each day, in each celebration, that the Grace of the Spirit from Jesus give more hunger for contact with Our God. I concentrated several times during the week on the family and the need for family prayer. So many men folks don't come to Mass, and of those who do come, it is more the mother with some kids, so more important family prayer at home. Again, this was different with so many men present with their wives and kids. I can only give Thanks to God Who so inspired the attendance. Certainly, I don't expect this to continue (of course I could accept it if it came about), but something of God must remain in those who came. I am ever so grateful for what happened as Our God so touches us.

Now Wednesday April 3: Going back to the start of March (Mar. 8), we had our first "feria", (like the Bowie Trades Day) a day in which the kids must practice presenting to the public for sale their items made in their classes. It went very well. Probably and I

am guessing, some 500 or more folks came, mostly parents of the kids, but even they could bring products for sale. I am not sure that anyone did. With the sale items we also had some folk dancing that helps draw people also. The stands of the basketball court were all filled and people, mostly students, 100 or more, standing around. As I have said before, this is to give the kids some practice of presenting their products to the public, learning to put prices on their things taking into consideration the cost of production, and some profit for living. The public, in this case, was mostly the parents although there were some others from the neighborhood and town of Cabezas. We will have 3 more days of this type already planned each month with dates until the end of June when our winter vacation will give the students and teachers a rest break of two weeks before continuing with classes until the end of November. This is something like our Christmas break in the U.S almost like a mid-year break.

Something else this month of March that was different too. We had the national census that is supposed to take place every 10 years but has been set aside somewhat. Of course, this affects the politics of the ruling parties when it is found out that so many folks in the western part of the country have moved east where there is more farmland (millions of acres of what was native forest) now being cut and given to new settlers who have left their origins to find new lives. So, in the governing bodies of the two houses of congress there is always fighting and, this time at least, several years of delay. Volunteers are asked to help, and teachers are obligated, but given a day of rest before and after. There is this year as always accusations of manipulation of data of one side or another on the local level as well as the national level. The results of tabulation of results will take several months to tally, almost until the end of the year 2024. The next elections are scheduled for 2025.

I am trying this school year to present to our schools here two new projects. One is the raising and planting of some 5000 new trees, mostly all native to this area of less water. I have read that the president of Kenya in Africa has set his goal of 1 million trees, a lot more than my imagination. But yet I want to do something possible here to help the climate. My hope is to be able in the various educational groups to seed and set to grow every two months some 1000 or more small trees that produce flowers for bee honey (there are some 12 trees of this type in our area, told to me by a specialist in trees in our technical Institute) as well as fruit trees. This is my imagination thinking that these types of trees will find more interest in the people who will plant and keep growing up for producing some help for the family or groups who will take care so that trees will grow and produce fruit the area around us. Please pray this works out for the benefit of our whole area, maybe even catching so that other schools or groups in our area will do the same. We might sell some to those interested and plant a lot on our land.

The other project that I wish we can have is a tank that can grow fish. Let me explain a little. There is a type of hothouse system that grows vegetables in pipes laid out level with holes on the upper side of the plastic tube into which is placed a small vegetable plant that will grow big and produce its fruit with its roots in the tube. The water filled with nutrients in the tube is circulated through various tubes by a motor. We have

had this before, but never did we do very well. Now a new agriculture teacher in the adult high school knows how to do this. But more, the nutrient water can also flow through a tank where fish can grow. My concern here is that our area is becoming increasingly dry where cattle will have a hard time living. The people need protein and fish could well help in this. This method is taught in our technical institute, but we have no structure where they can practice what they learn. This will help them also in their learning process. And if what we have is successful the villages around us can do the same for the benefit of their people. So, we dream and hope!

This is our rainy season and no rain practically. There have been sprinkles at various times but only three rains that were significant for crops growing here in Cabezas. Our land in the mountains was different; there was more rain, and we are at present cutting silage for our milk cows and bringing it to Cabezas. There also will be corn for our hogs too from there, some 40 acres or more. I don't do well in multiplying the acres from hectares, not sure of the exact amount. So, we are by force planning more irrigation. We are having to learn by experience mostly in our fields which is different in size from our vegetable gardens. Much more work on a large field!

(Now Friday, Apr. 5) I got a real big surprise this last Holy Saturday, a phone call from Mexico about an interview that a radio announcer had made with me at noon Holy Thursday. The radio is a local Cabezas station, now private (actually I did not know of it, although it started last October, '23. I never listen to the radio, nor watch television). The interview was asking me for some comments on the religious meaning of each day of Holy Week. The announcer had told me that all would be put on Facebook, but it just never occurred to me such universal implications. An ex-religious who had worked here with us some years back, now in Mexico taking care of her elderly parents had seen the interview on Facebook and surprised me with the telephone call. This struck me with how small our world is becoming, with contact immediate from so far away. Of course, the interview is in Spanish, but it goes world-wide, even in the U. S. Actually, this Friday, today, the same announcer will visit us and all that we do, interview students and teachers, see our hogs, gardens, cows, mechanic's shop, gastronomy classroom, physical therapy room, all that we do. And with this he will ask viewers for some help for us, all his idea. It just never occurred to me this idea. See how limited I am in understanding the world now that we live in! And what else will the future bring? This is what Pope Francis has understood for so long, a world that needs new tactics in pastoral that can bring the Faith so precious that our world needs, but new ways to reach populations that no longer are the same as even 60 years ago when I was ordained.

Just learned that the interview for the radio will not be today because of a sickness in the announcer's family. So next Friday.

After writing the above paragraph I am back to the reality of the GREAT NEED FOR JESUS CHRIST IN OUR WORLD TODAY! You probably are tired of me talking about the world's problems, wars, hunger, floods and droughts from climate-caused disasters. Of course, there were always floods and droughts, but it seems worse than before, world-wide sicknesses that can spread much faster with folks in airplanes

constantly flying from one place to another, who knows what else? What Jesus Christ brings is a sensitivity for the good of others, making us thinking of others more and how our presence and our love affects them. And our Faith is world-wide, One Body in Jesus Christ if we were to live our Faith to its highest degree, sainthood for us all. But this level of Faith begins with each of us, I'm reading and meditating the Gospels every day and trying to live as Jesus Christ with the Spirit of Jesus that resides within me. I'm talking about myself, but I want to include all of us, those of you who read this letter and the rest of those who profess Faith in this Savior Jesus. It is His Love lived out in us that changes the world. Sorry, I have meditated and thought thousands of times on this I just don't see a more effective solution to our very materialistic and egotistical world than Our Faith Lived in Jesus Christ!

I could go on and on. I want to say again, I pray daily for all of you who read this, those who help us with little or much. All is God's love towards those in need, our passage into Heaven eternal with Our God.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames

We are volunteers supporting ETC Bolivia. The current contact information at the Diocese of Fort Worth to continue to financially support the children is: Dianna Rhoads (817) 533-3174 or via e-mail at: DRhoads@adv-fdn.org

The following link takes you directly to the Diocese ETC-B web page for easiest access to donate on-line:
<https://fwdioc.org/educate-the-children-bolivia>

To donate by paper check, make it payable to: Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth. On the memo line, please write, "For ETC-Bolivia, Fr. Thames Mission". Mail it to: Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76108-2919. Please reply to this e-mail if we may answer any questions.