

## Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter December 2018

Dear Family all,

Here so late is the December letter, I did send one a couple of days ago that explained most of the problems. May Our Lord bless all of YOU.

Here it is the 10th of January. Sorry for this delay in the monthly letter. I did write a letter that was sent to several folks yesterday, explaining all the problems. I was with some health problems since the 17<sup>th</sup> of December. I did continue with all the Masses and Baptisms, but little else. Finally on Jan. 2 I had a complete health check-up that showed up several problems. My cardiologist who is my main health provider put me into the hospital for 5 days of therapy. I yet have some problems, especially without sight in my left eye, but am doing better on several other fronts.

Our regular high school graduation was on Dec. 7, with 42 graduates (the whole class made it through), then the adult high school graduation the next day, on Saturday. A lot of them received also their technical courses diploma, something that has been a problem in previous years. I walked one of the regular high school graduates, a young girl who has been with us here since the second grade of elementary. She is now hoping to get into the university to study industrial design, a good field even in Bolivia. Just today I and Luzbaida (whom many of you know) went to visit a man who may be able to help various students get scholarships. Just keep this in your prayers. We in our school have more students than other high schools with higher percentages who want to go on the higher study. And in actuality more of ours do to go on, if not immediately, then after a year of working, saving money to get enrolled. On graduation day we had our graduation in the morning of Friday. The next day the adult high school, Saturday, had their graduation in the afternoon, the day being really hot. The bugs were all over our faces, including the graduates who used their high school diplomas to ward off the bugs while on stage. But it was a matter of survival for all of us. In the month of December, we put some money down on another tractor, with the final payment being at the end of January 2019. We have needed this for a while, but the price of this one and being in good condition brought us along enough to put down some money. Ultimately the money used was the gain on our small endowment fund in the Diocese.

A good number of our high school students stayed over the summer (ours here) to work on the various things that need attention (land near the mountains, milk cows, hogs, now some chickens, garden, repairing broken beds, windows, doors, desks). But there is another difference this year. Just about half of the adult employees were given off, with their contracts ending the end of November, and we employed students to work in the kitchen and in the gastronomy kitchen. Luckily it has turned out very well, so bodes good for the future. This coming school year we hope to use groups of students with interest in making bread (both for our own use and special bread now being made for sale to the public). They will have to rise to be at work from 4 am to 6am, then on to class. But it will be a volunteer basis with some payment for their labor, and also prepare them for a profession in their future. At present our gastronomy kitchen is making 3 special types of

bread that is selling more and more. This was just in Cabezas, but yesterday (9 Jan.) we began in Abapó, the largest town in our area. People are buying more and more of our products, a good sign for our future.

With our expanded living area in my house, we built a huge Christmas crib display, and we have been having our weekly religious service there with the students. It is yet there, and we will follow the practice that many Mexican families have of leaving the crib up until Ash Wednesday. The kids also decorated the other rooms as well, giving a different atmosphere to our place. The kids also drew names and exchanged presents (Clementine, the nurse's idea, not mine, as I see Christmas too commercialized, even in Bolivia). All went well with lots of food, especially our home-made ice cream and cakes made by our students in the gastronomy kitchen, where we have a big commercial oven that is heat and time controlled, and water is used to keep all baking soft automatically. Our big feast has been and yet is, on December 26, after all Masses have been offered in so many villages, Religious Sisters included, and all of us are free to rest a little. To this feast we invite all the workers who are with us, even those who have ended their year's contract. Luckily the day was beautiful, sun and not so hot, so all the tables and chairs were out under the trees with a cool breeze. All beautiful! Of course, my own participation was limited by my health, but I yet really enjoyed it all.

It has continued to rain this year, more than other recent years. So, our crops are doing fine, yet not having time to plant all our fields. The weeds are growing too, and the kids here are busy trying to control that with some hoes and with our small tractor with cultivators. We yet have planted some 40 to 45 acres, with about that same amount yet to be planted. Our land in the mountains has gotten more rain, and has made us limited to work in the fields. In the month of December we bought 100 baby chicks, with 98 still surviving. It reminds me of back home when we bought baby chicks every year, one half roosters, the other half laying hens. Here we don't know how many what are, but we will keep the hens for "farm" eggs (not caged hen eggs) for their better taste, and continue to buy more so that we have a good number of hens. This is for our school of agriculture as well in order to teach this as part of our offering in technical courses. Here we will vaccinate them this week and some students will be here to participate in this. Here one problem that did not exist at home is a large lizard (up to two feet long) that can eat smaller chicks, also the eggs, and even attack the larger ones.

In the first letter of yesterday I reported on Noelia, the young 16-year-old girl with the degenerative bone disease and the other leg that is crooked at the entrance to the foot. Hopefully you all received this too. Also, Allison, a young 12-year-old girl, who was pregnant and now given birth by C-section. Both are doing fine now. Noelia will have the other foot operation in a week and half, and after the first leg heals enough, she will have a prosthesis put on that will allow here to walk on her own for the first time in her life. With God's Grace she is one of the happiest kids I have ever known, always in good spirits.

The tension on the international front has been on my mind a lot and thinking that Jesus Christ has been born and lived His Life precisely to save our whole world, not just baptized individuals. The

Grace of the Holy Spirit was poured out on all, not just the baptized and Vatican II proclaims yet today that all who live their consciences to the fullest without being able to know the Gospel of Jesus through no fault of their own, will not have Salvation denied them (read Vatican II, Lumen Gentium chapter two, paragraph 16). But how can folks without the Gospel available come to know the Way of Salvation if we who believe and try to practice the Faith do not live in such a way as to give others a visible knowledge? If we live as the “rest of our world”, following a reduced gospel that is more worldly than Godly, with so many worldly values that obscure the small bit that we do show, how will these others without Faith come to know the “TRUTH” of Jesus Christ. With so many of us maybe Jesus died in vain the horrible death on the cross, because “HIS WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE” (John 14,6) is hid so deeply within our daily living, that no one might suspect that we are believers. Back to the first sentence of this reflection, for me it is more and more paramount, more urgent than ever in my life time, to bring our Faith to the front of our lives daily, so that people around us can see “CHRIST IN US”. Our world sorely needs us as we are God’s instruments for the Salvation of others. As Fr. Tom Craig (in peace may Our Lord rest his soul) always said, **if we are baptized, we are missionaries. Let our Faith show itself for the Love of Our Lord. LET US BE IN TRUTH MISSIONARIES FOR OTHERS.**

As we end this year of 2018, I am praying and hoping that all of you who read this letter and others throughout the year already have or will shortly renew your money to us, one or more scholarships or however you wish to help those most in need in our part of Bolivia! MAY OUR GOD, HUMBLE LOVER OF US ALL BE WITH EACH AND EVERYONE THIS NEW YEAR!

Your brother in Jesus Christ,  
Fr. Bob Thames