

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter
February 2019

Dear Family all, Greetings!

Here is the very late Feb. 2019 letter. It has a rather long reflection, a part of which was used in the sermons there. I could put a lot more Scripture references, these are but a few that can be meditated, these the first that came to my mine.

Sorry for this being so late. I was in the U. S., and a little lazy and somewhat distracted by some events. Now 14 March. Here again in Bolivia, my real home for some 25 years or more now, but mostly what makes it home are the young folks who are my kids, the ones that have become my family that is closest to me in responsibility and affection. You all know how affection has a way of captivating a person, even if that was not the plan when it all began. I am happy to say that all went very well in my absence, so I am not so necessary in truth, but I yet want to feel that way. And Our Lord helped also for my arrival with rain coming down, only a little in the city, but became a steady downpour as we got closer to Cabezas. Actually this was only the second rain since I had left and was really needed. It had rained a little the Saturday before I came back, so this steady rain, not so hard as to run off to the river, but long and steady. This soaked in. Some crops of others have failed already, sadly to say, but our crops near the mountains had more moisture and all will be ready to harvest in some 3 weeks (corn, soy beans, and silage). But something also new this year, we will have sugar cane to harvest (we need more yet to plant, but a good start), which we will turn into molasses to mix with our cow feed. Even the pressed-out stalk will be grounded and used in the feed. My own experience bears out its value, and a veterinarian who recently came to work with us tells me more. Molasses helps generate more milk in milk cows. More to share on this as our use develops. We just need to get a cane press that cost here very little.

I must take this opportunity to say **THANK YOU** for all the help given to us in my first trip to the Diocese of Fort Worth this year. It went very well despite my bending over wrong and having a hip come out (artificial one), and being put for two days in the hospital. I was taken by ambulance to an emergency room waiting for attention and almost the first person to come in was Bishop Olsen who came to give me Anointing of the Sick and pray with me. For that reason I missed talking at several Masses, but the very dedicated volunteers came through for us. Just keep in mind that I pray daily for all of you, but especially

for those who help each weekend that I am there, plus other times of preparing material and setting up dates, sending out mailings, etc.

(now Friday, 15 Mar.) Yesterday I spent a good bit of time getting clothes for some of the kids in my house, some new ones who did not feel so free to talk to me when they had just arrived before I left in early February. Most of the kids who come from very difficult homes, especially single Moms, come with almost nothing, all their possessions in a small plastic bag. Actually after talking with the kids who have been here for a while they are able to open up to say what they need. I think I have already shared with you all, many single mother households even go hungry at times. Good clothes are of a second level of need.

Technical courses this year have caused a problem because of the added time that must be given to the practice. Up to this point as of last year, it was almost all theory classes. Now the full weight of the practice (60 to 70 % of the time to the course) is being demanded. So a technical course takes up some 16 hours each week along with the regular humanistic courses. I support the addition, but I personally believe that some adjustments will have to be made, my suggestion being to add more school years to the practice. Now the practice is only started in the last two years of a 7 year course. There are some 2400 hours of class and practice demanded for a medium degree, so if spread out over 4 years it could easily be done. Two years puts too much time to one activity putting all the other courses in jeopardy. It might be possible to use some of the summer months once or twice also putting into practice the profession. Now I am afraid we might have kids dropping out of our school for it being too hard. We are the only school with the technical courses, even though the president proclaimed it for all. No funds were given for paying teachers of the technical courses so it is being implemented very slowly. Our kids look around seeing other schools with less work and they feel sorry for themselves now, not thinking so much of the future of having a profession that will help them in several ways. Our actual assistance in technical classes is going better than I had thought. The kids are really responding which has caused us to have to divide some groups to be able to fit into the number of kids per class (30). Actually I was worried about possible low attendance.

Today, Friday, March 15, is a teachers' workshop day, so no classes. This is part because of my insistence to the district superintendent to have a teachers' workshop at least for our school. I have asked for at least 3 days of teacher workshops during the year, but I would prefer 4 days. We had only one day last year, held in our new auditorium. This year the workshop was held in the

new public high school that is on the highway, and so more accessible for those teachers coming from the small towns around us. The quality of education especially in small villages is often very poor, so the students arriving to our school have to spend almost a year of catching up, some even having to learn to read better in the sixth grade. But my interest is also for our teachers who can teach with more effectiveness to our kids. And the workshops attended will add to the teachers' curriculum vitae for any future assignment that comes their way.

My mishap there in Fort Worth this time around has helped make the Diocese concerned about what will happen when I am incapable to oversee the work here or even die, leaving all to the folks here who have been with me for so long. The finance head in a meeting in the Catholic Center asked for a set-up here that will guarantee the continuance with the confidence of the Diocese. A group of us met this morning (Friday, 15 Feb.) in the school to talk of this and plan a type of organizational chart that will show how and who will maintain the work here. Of course all of this is theory until put into practice, but at least we are thinking, planning, being concerned here, along with the Diocese. The fact is that there is a lot going on here brought about by so many folks here with so much generous help from the Diocese. May Our Lord forbid that it stop because of my absence. I am ever conscious that I have been a very small part in all that goes on here and it seems just a question of re-organizing to make sure all continues.

Just this morning (now Saturday 16 Mar.) I went to see the new chemistry lab. The district superintendent has told me, and others have verified it, that the Ministry of Education will give us some elements for our lab, maybe even some instruments. I hope to get this done this coming week. The lab will be used by the regular high school plus the adult high school. This will deepen our understanding of things today, so much needed in so many fields of our modern society.

I want to end this letter with a rather long reflection that came about quite a bit while in the U. S., although this is something that is world-wide.

1) My point first is to state what is most essential to the Church. St. Paul insists that we are the Body of Christ, plunged into His Body at Baptism, becoming members of Christ Himself. This is the most essential of all and means that our attention as parts of His Body must first and foremost always carry a consciousness of being part of Him. This must mean too that with this our first consciousness we must daily have prayerful and biblical contact plus

our Sunday community liturgy as our Source, our Power, our Life in its most basic center. It seems to me that if in daily living Jesus Christ is not a constant contact, we are forgetting the most essential element of who we are, what gives us Life and substance of Living. The longer we do without this daily contact the more distant we are and the weaker we are in Faith. This relationship is invisible to our world, but is the most essential, the most basic. (1 Corinthians 12,12-13 &27; Matthew 16,24-27; John 15,5-10)

2) The second element of who we are as Church is what follows from our contact and being put into Christ, that is, we form from Faith and our relation with Jesus Christ a Community of Believers that needs organization visible in this world. From this flows our need to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in our world today. As an individual and as a community we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ, visibility that the world needs as leaven in the dough, light in the darkness, salt in the food. As I insisted above this testimony of Jesus, making Jesus and His Salvation visible and available, demands that we constantly are in contact ourselves with Jesus so that He is reflected by our lives. Without this constant contact, our receiving then giving to others, we diminish in clarity of witness. We are failing as believers. (Acts 2,32-39; 2 Corinthians 5,14-21)

3) It is here that we find much danger today, it seems to me. We are seen in our world, those without faith, as just another organization, another institution, among so many others. This attitude can be contagious too for us who say we believe, just to be satisfied being a part of a worldly organization that gives us an identity, maybe friends who support us, but sorely lacking in what is the most essential, that is, the Relation directly, daily and penetrating into our actual daily living from the Person of Jesus Christ. We are part of just another world group and our lives just like all the rest of our no-faith world. Jesus just does not enter in, does not have a part of it. It is possible that at one time there was some relation with Jesus, but gradually without contact its influence diminished. Or maybe it never existed on a conscious level. The world so much absorbed us that we did not see the need to have or to maintain this actual, living relationship. So our lives continue as just another non-believer, even while we occasionally said we believed if someone asked us.

4) But this could go further yet. It is possible that someone or other actually came into active service of the Church community as minister, more motivated by what the Church as visible, worldly organization could offer leaving out the spiritual, that is, some prestige, an easy material life, some security in the physical sphere. The Relation with Jesus Christ had very little influence in the decision to be recognized as minister, or perhaps almost none. And without

this constant relationship with Jesus to give us strength to live as living testimony of Jesus, the person began to take on actions and life-style that goes directly against Jesus Christ. How else can we explain some of the abuses of money and sexual behavior that has so ravaged our confidence in the Church today?

But this is a call to us on an individual level to go back to that which is most basic, our direct and daily Relationship with Jesus. He must be our Center and constant Source of Life through prayer, Scripture, Sunday Mass and daily Mass if possible. If others have failed, it does not mean that we must fail also. All the more are we called to greater fidelity to witness the Salvation that Jesus brought by his Life, Death, and Resurrection. All the more does our world need us Faithful and Visible (our Testimony). It seems to me then that letting our relation with the Church community disappear is all the more irresponsible. While others fail, it is all the more important for us to be ever more faithful.

5) One last point could be made. Jesus came precisely to save sinners. Only extreme arrogance and false pride would exclude us from this universal category. We too in our Faith are Fruit of the Saving Power of Jesus Christ. Humility and a sense of servant-hood to others, especially the poor and abandoned, migrants, victims of any type of violence, including those who have suffered at the hands of Church members, this must be our merciful living, sharing in the Great Mercy of Our God. Then we are fulfilling our Call to Holiness, to give testimony to our world so much in need of Jesus Christ.

I end this letter saying Thank you all for so much support in the various parishes. At the same time asking you to renew your scholarship(s) commitments so our work here of Mercy might continue, we your visible hands in Bolivia.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames