

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter

April 2018

Dear Family all of you there, Greetings!

Here is the April letter a little late. I hope it finds all well and doing fine in your lives, family and all.

Today is the 4th of May, late to be just starting this letter. I arrived from the U. S. only on May first, went directly to a village whose patron saint is St. Joseph the Worker (also happens to be the name of the village and is our national Labor Day, a holiday in Bolivia). I arrived there just before 12 noon for the Mass and a baptism, then some food which is always part and parcel of a feast, and followed by them with a soccer match, again always part and parcel of their celebrations here. Even though the village now has a high school nearby in a small town just two miles about from it and the kids from the village attend high school there (going by motorcycle), it was not always that way. When we began our school here in Cabezas the young high school age kids came here to school and I knew several of them, now married with kids of their own. Others who attended here have made their homes elsewhere, but the village was not strange for me. Actually it is in the neighboring diocese from the archdiocese of Santa Cruz. But I do work several villages in that diocese now. My hope is to start Mass there one Sunday a month and also start a bible study group there. One of the young mothers was a religious sister for 5 years so is not new to the Faith, known by me as she was from the city parish I had many years back. My group left just as they were starting the soccer match. Here in Cabezas, I rested a little, praying in my chapel, then to a cake and chocolate feed to celebrate my return given by those of my house. My first thought here also is a THANK YOU to all there in the U. S. who made our visit fruitful and gave me so much hospitality.

Now about some things that went on while I was away from her. One of the people who works with us, Luzbaida as many of you know her, has made several courses in the city in gastronomy, a part of which was bread making. We have two industrial ovens, one especially for bread making (Thanks to Mike Wuller). Luz with two other women who make bread for the students at the school began making special bread (mixture of white and whole wheat flour with eggs also—all I know about it) and it was become a big seller in Cabezas, worth over \$1000 a month less the cost of materials. We could double or triple the amount now without worrying about the selling. Actually we have known that there is a deficit of bread on the market in our whole area, but Luz did not know how to use the special bread oven. Learning how to use it in one of the courses now makes it feasible for us to start. Probably we will need to hire a man to help as the big pans with the dough to cook are heavy. I would like to involve some students whose technical course is gastronomy, so they will leave here with good experiences in practice. And it will help us earn some money for the school as well. Along with this our plan is to start to cook at least one meal a month using the same students, so they can learn to make many types of food. Then if all goes well, more students will want to get involved, so we could make one special meal a week using different groups. This would probably be Thursday evening, making the meal for Friday noon. We might even be able to sell some plates of food to the technical institute students who are in classes at that time as they are older working students who must buy their food from the vendors out on the street in front of the school.

While I was away also the first bi-mester terminated. A bi-mester is the word used here to indicate one of four study sessions (4 semesters in American language) that make up a year of study for us. I explained this last year when it first began if some of you might remember. I indicated that this four part division allows those who are lazy starting out the year, to be able to make up for low grades later on to pass on to the next grade. Unfortunately there are some in my house who need this, but luckily all passed last year, getting on the ball as the year progressed. The report cards were given out today with a meeting of parents using our new auditorium for the first time. But I did not have time to collect the report cards of the students of my house for whom I am parent. This mixture of joy and sadness (good and bad

grades) still awaits me next week. We don't give the report cards to the students, only to parents to make sure the parents know how their students are doing. We had a meeting with the parents in our new auditorium which lacks benches yet, although the metal frames are waiting for the wooden seats to be placed on top. We will eventually have enough benches for some 180 to 190 people. And with some 50 plastic chairs when needed, we will handle well over two hundred folks or students as the case may be. And the auditorium can be divided into two large classrooms, one on either side, using moveable walls for large groups of students when the need presents. And for an extra, we will use the auditorium for the Wednesday night religious service with the religious sisters from Mora.

Just some more good news...the principle of the adult high school program spoke to me today, and I asked for the number of students. A whopping big jump, with 655 adult students in the regular adult program with technical courses, and from the regular high school there are 120 students taking technical courses in the adult regime. (All students in our 3 regular schools plus others from outside can take any of the technical courses they wish. If they are not enrolled in one of the schools they just receive a certificate of formation.) So the total number of students in the adult program is 775, a huge jump from last year (under 500 in all). I believe the difference is the principle that is a retired regular high school principle that treats people much better and dedicates himself to serve as best he can. His presence is paying off.

Our retreat center with its monthly retreat had fewer young folks in April, the week before I returned. Only some 95 students attended although the quality was good from reports I had. The difference was the competition from other activities especially for the senior class who could not attend. But some help for formation was held on May 1, a national holiday here in Bolivia. There was a leadership afternoon held for youth from the deanery, and some 60 students attended, some 30 from our own high school, and some 30 from our dormitory group in Mora with the sisters (there the students attend the public school; we giving only food and lodging.) The youth came back pumped up as the quality was very good.

With this letter I would like to include a story of a young girl, Noelia by name, 15 years of age and in the 6th grade, ALWAYS WITH A SMILING FACE, which belies her circumstances of existence (see pictures below). Her mother has died; her father is rather short of stature, but also crippled. He yet works some as best he can to support Noelia and himself. Noelia most of the time is in her wheel chair, but on some rare occasions she walks with crutches with much difficulty. She has some rare degenerative bone disease which has left her as she is, and if not treated by cutting off both legs from the knee the disease will eventually spread and kill her. (Forgive me if I do not understand all the details. What I share is what I understand). I am sharing her story, knowing her situation, yet how she maintains a happy outlook on life, the fact that she is alive and has the chance to study. I do not know if Noelia knew of all of the ramifications of her disease before she came to us in February, but was referred to us by another family with kids here in our school and knowing that we here in our school take the difficult situations which other schools avoid. There is an orthopedic doctor considered the best in Santa Cruz (here called a traumatólogo) who is a friend of mine who has done both hip replacements, but whom I came to know in 2007 when my car was smashed (and I also, with all bones on my right side broken) by a big Volvo truck with a drunk driver on Good Friday. He does a lot of charity work and wants to come to Cabezas to do operations free of charge when our hospital has the capacity to handle such bone problems. Actually our hospital is being enlarged at present to be almost doubled in size, but it will be at least another six months to a year before we are ready. Meanwhile we think that Noelia can't wait for this hospital to be finished. I am trying at present to get a total cost estimate from the doctor, but he is sometimes hard to catch, being in demand from so many persons. For years he has worked two hours every morning in the big city/state hospital where the poorest go (he's so well-known and respected), so he is involved with so many folks who have no other options.

As a reflection this month I would like to present a simple way to meditate the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus Christ. This method we use in Prado (the voluntary secular institute of diocesan priests related directly to the Pope) but in more detail. Step One: take a Gospel passage that presents Jesus Christ in a teaching or action or both, read it over several

times, searching out the relation that Jesus has with His Father, His union, especially His striving to live out the Father's Will. (Remember that Jesus says this in St. John 5, 19 and St. John 5, 30, so entering more deeply into Jesus one comes into the Heart of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But this is the Heart of the Christian Life. Then ask yourself do you sense a call to enter more deeply into this attitude of Jesus, and if so, how for your particular situation. Then ask yourself again what difficulties you see for you to enter into this deeper living out of the Life of Jesus. Then entering into Jesus (for me with eyes closed and my attention centered within me to make contact directly with Jesus Who lives within, try to abandon yourself into God's Hands that God may do what God wants within you. Stay in this at least for 5 minutes, but better 15, or more. The more you do this, the easier it becomes. Step Two: Studying again the text of the Scripture try to delve into the exterior manifestation of The Father by Jesus. This is because we are called to give testimony (witness to others) of the Life of Jesus in us. Our world so needs this witness, but more than just an interior thing that no one sees. Our lives so many times are just living like all those around us, living more like the world lives rather than a witness of Jesus Alive in us. Again ask yourself how you can put into practice what you discover as an external evidence of the Father's Love that you find in Jesus in the passage. Again ask yourself what difficulties you find in practicing this outward attitude. Again enter into deeper union with Jesus to receive the power to live out what you have found in Jesus. The more you do this, the easier it is, as your concentration grows and facilitates your growth.

I THANK ALL OF YOU for your interest and help to us with our kids.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,

Fr. Bob Thames



Noelia - 15 years of age (6th grader).

