

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter April 2019

Dear Family, all of you who partner with us in service to the poor of our area of Bolivia. Here is the monthly letter for April, not too late, and from Fort Worth, Texas.

It is now the 6th of May, and here I am in Fort Worth, U. S. A., visiting parishes to make appeals for help to our work, and having a rather large family reunion with the four of us, 3 sisters and one brother (myself) yet on this earth. This year more of the second generation attended. This was good for us old folks who see more bonds of unity in a family that is very scattered area-wise, but sensing closeness and mentality that makes us family. I thank God for all of this, as family have made me by raising me, forming me spiritually, and giving me a sense of Mission in this world. I really appreciate working on our family history that helped make all this understanding deeper. This we did about 30 years ago. I highly recommend making a family history to all of you. You will be surprised at the discovery of genes that you find in yourselves today that were passed to you that came from your ancestors. At least that was my discovery, and it was a big Grace from Our God. It helped by offering a stabilizing element in my personality and an understanding of how Our God works in the developing of our world of people, being able to add new things on top of things present from the past generations, that which I received from others and what I needed as a calling or mission to do to build on this as my contribution for the generations that are to follow. We had some good discussions on life in this life, as well as a sharing of experiences and elements that prepare us for the life to come, the reality of Life after Death, so boldly presented in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, with His Power that made possible.

Back in Bolivia, to bring all up to date, Holy Week brought us to a halt in our classes in school. We were allowed to stop classes at 10 AM, Holy Thursday, allowing students to get home early in daylight, with our trucks carrying the students home early, not having classes until 6 PM as is normal on that day. And we were allowed to pick up students on Monday morning after Easter rather than have students traveling on Easter Day itself with classes starting at 10:30 AM on Monday. Some of our students helped in Holy Week services that the sisters carry out, as the sisters from Mora help out in our high school two days a week with leadership formation and a religious service for Sunday. I am sure that I have told you all of this before but repeated here. Before when I was yet in pastoral work, some 40 or more boys and girls helped in religious services in many communities in Holy Week. Now much fewer as I am no longer involved in pastoral except in the few villages in the mission diocese to the southwest of Cabezas.

The week before Holy Week was the time of what is called in Bolivia our Olympics. This is a big name that means a type of competition of sports and educational meet which includes both boys and girls, with chess, Ping-Pong, volleyball, mathematics and science, among other things that do not come to mind right now, as well as soccer and all of that which we include in our track meets. It lasts a week, usually from Sunday until the Saturday following. Our school had some 140 students, both boys and girls participating. It is competitive, and losers can come back home after being ruled out. The winners stay on to the end, and we had our share of winners too. Several years ago, I had bad feelings toward all of this, but now see a sense of purpose in camaraderie across towns and school divisions that certainly are of value. We are of one big community as area Bolivians and more as part of a larger world that needs interaction so as to be one world. This competition was a district meet. Now the winners will pass on to a provincial meet, then to departmental (for the U. S, it means state), then to national. You might remember that last year one of our students won the national (all of Bolivia) 100 meters dash. Surely, he will be there again this year, hopefully winning again. His time was just over 11 seconds, very good for a high school junior. He was given a scholarship in any teacher training school if he so wants to become a physical education teacher after finishing high school.

Back in Cabezas we continue to work on our hydroponics, the type of greenhouse the uses water with nutrients rather than soil to produce vegetables. Also, we are getting into producing estevia, a natural sweetener plant that is a substitute for sugar and less damaging for the body. As I am not there in Cabezas I only know that the construction goes on for our first one, but I do not know exactly where they are in it. Also, the workers in all the areas had a type of retreat with one of the former employees who did administrative work several years back. He is educated in business administration in the university and has experience where he works today. As he married, and his wife did not want to live in the country, he lives now in the city. His retreat was both religious and practical, encouraging the workers to see their time as apostolate to serving in our area and the responsibility we have as catalyst for others in the area. He happens to be a confirmation catechist in his parish in the city with many years of experience in this as well as part of the music ministry in his parish. The first semester has finished of the 4 that we have now, this one just over 2 months long. Report cards surely have been given while I am gone. One of my kids, a boy orphan who came to us as a first-grade elementary student is very bad on his grades. He is in a type of military service time that allows him to study at the same time, which service will finish in June. But he is missing many classes and is not getting homework too. It bothers me as I have talked with him so many times before I left. He is sure he will make it up in future semesters. I sure would hate to see him fail in this senior year now in progress. Right now, there are 41 kids in my house, with 3 bedrooms of girls and 3 of boys.

Too many! I find it not so hard to work with 25 or so, but 41 are just a lot to herd over. Several have more severe habits and need a lot of attention. While I am gone, Clementina Moye, who has been with me for some 22 years is taking care of them now, but some of the boys do not obey her very well. She is a university graduate nurse with several courses of further study, especially in physical therapy and natural medicine, which is recognized in Bolivia. She is extremely active in so many areas, a great help. One of my life-changers came about when I first began to study philosophy back when I was 20 years old. What I saw so clearly then as now is the great injustices in our world. It seems to me that the greater part of our world's population then, now, and since the beginning of time, has suffered so much. Some of it is caused by other people who have exploited their sisters and brothers, but other things too that are natural occurrences that have had so damaging effects on the lives of people. It seemed to me then as now that this goes against the grain of our human intelligence that demands, at least seeks, some justice understood as a human life with the possibility of unity among people, working in harmony together at least in some peace that allows others to live and enjoy some friendship. If we did not understand this harmony then it would not be so bad, but we do have this intelligence, this felt need, for friendship. It is part and parcel of being human. We are not animals who live only by instinct, most self-concerned with self-existence. It was in late May or early April of 1975 when there appeared in the Abilene newspaper that I received in Breckenridge where I was stationed then, a letter from a high school senior, just about to graduate. He basically wrote that he had tried all the elements that he understood about life and its pleasures, sex, drugs, alcohol, and what else, and none of it was worth it. So, he committed suicide. His life to me, as far as his letter could help me understand, was limited to this animal part of our existence. If we don't look beyond that, what is worth living as humans? But if we have an intelligence that can look beyond animal existence, and we only see the major part of humanity in misery (throughout our history), is being human better than just being just animal, at least for the major part of our humanity? We are only frustrated being human. Then I understood for the first time the greater depth of understanding of the importance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This life is only the beginning of human existence, our preparation time, for the real and really human life that is to follow. The injustices of this life are only temporary and this for all humanity. By the Power of Jesus Christ, Our God, we are shown that this life is just the beginning for what follows. And this life that follows cures all our weaknesses and failings of humanity that we see in this world. It is a sharing in God's life, this fullness of love that is the fulfillment of being made in the image and likeness of Our Creator. It is the answer to all our longings for a better existence even if we participated in this life as part cause of its afflictions. We can change and be forgiven. We long for more and better and we see it attainable by being immersed in Jesus Christ Who lived a Life of Mercy and so showed us what real human life is about. And this Life of Mercy produces in Jesus Christ, and by the power of Jesus Christ, the life we long for, but see impossible with just worldly power, worldly

ambition. But with God all is possible. Our lives of Mercy, participating in the Living Mercy of Jesus, opens to us here and hereafter, to all God has prepared for us as the fullness of being human, that is the Life of Heaven, the Life of God, for which we were destined to attain before selfishness entered in and began its decaying effect on life in this world. Now with Faith in Jesus, that must produce Mercy in the living of our own lives, we know that our feeble efforts, fortified by Jesus Christ and His Grace, will bring us with the Father's Mercy to this eternal and full life of God, just and happy, that we all long for.

Please pray and think about us in Bolivia, the 500 kids who need your help for making a more human life for them and allowing them also to be merciful to others in the future with the talents that were developed in our educational process that is the schools of Our Lady of Carmen, Cabezas. Renew your scholarship pledge if possible as it comes due. I THANK ALL OF YOU FOR YOUR HELP TO OUR KIDS IN BOLIVIA AND YOUR KINDNESS TO ME WHILE I WAS HERE WITH YOU. I pray each day for you all, don't forget us in your prayer for Bolivia, your extended family.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames