

Fr. Bob Thames' Newsletter

April 2022

Greetings to all of you there this 28th day of April. I begin to write this letter with a misting rain falling, wetting the ground but not much more. We are just grateful for what Our Lord sends us. This year has seen several small rains, one flood back in December just before Christmas. Good for us that our land in the mountains had more and it seems we are doing well with our crops. For all we THANK OUR GOD WHO HAS BEEN SO GOOD TO US THIS YEAR!

As I told in the March letter we began classes with all the students at one time on March 21. Back to normal as it was before the virus came storming in. But Holy Week was different, with classes up until Wednesday, then students sent home on Thursday morning those who live further away. This was again the schedule the last week of April. The professors have a type of what they call olimpiados, which means the teachers of the whole district meet in one town to compete in sports, one group including women against another, this lasting for two days. So, it was this week, the last week of April. So, the students are free two days again as it was in Holy Week. I have decided to use these two days to make peanut butter with kids free to help. The peanuts are being roasted at this moment. The taste is already in my mouth.

The big news of this month of April is Holy Week. It was the best we have had for so many years. First for Palm Sunday. I had all of my house and the small kids' dorms up by the public school to attend all the Holy Week services with me in the chapel in Abapó. Also, a lot of our workers came with their families for most all of the celebrations there. Two different folks had cut palm branches from trees around here. Actually, there are at least 4 or 5 types of palm trees that grow here. But as it turned out we did not have enough for the folks who came. Yet all went well. We gathered on the public basketball court that is just beside the chapel in Abapó, blessing the palms there and marching to the chapel. There was a good turnout, but no idea of how many folks.

The big celebration was Holy Thursday. We had planned for a second group of First Communions that day and we were overwhelmed with people. Maybe you remember that we had benches brought from our school auditorium for use in the chapel meanwhile we had only one half of the kids in school at one time. On March 21 we again returned to full classes and had taken all the borrowed benches back to the school for our weekly religious celebration there. There were only some 23 kids in this group of First Communion, but for some reason about 280 to 310 folks came that evening, leaving almost a 100 people standing at the back of the chapel. The celebration was beautiful anyway as only Holy Thursday can be, with the washing of the feet, and the Holy Eucharist for the first time for those youngsters. These were kids who had started late in the class of 2021 and had to have classes added on to their late

start. Their first classmates of First Communion celebrated their feast on December 6 last year.

Good Friday was again Holy as only Good Friday can be. The stations of the cross started at 4 PM on the high ground above the chapel and made its way down ending at the chapel at 6 PM. I was not able to stand for the outside stations. My legs and feet don't hold up that long, so I met the group at the chapel and had the celebration there, again with a lot of people, some who had celebrated the stations, others who had come only for the celebration in the chapel. After our lack of benches on Holy Thursday we had brought 12 big benches from our school so that we had enough seating for the folks who came the rest of Holy Week. Good Friday really affects me, more than others perhaps. For me it is the TOTALITY OF GIVING OF JESUS ON THE CROSS that hits me right between the eyes and makes me urged to give myself more and more. I am part of the Body of Jesus, and this just pushes me to give, to give a little extra. It is really personal and deep, why I can't just retire at my age, sit down and read, relax, etc.

Again, on Holy Saturday we were flooded with people at the celebration. This so marks me starting in the darkness outside the chapel, lighting the fire, then the Easter candle with fire being passed on to all the people present with their candles. I explained how we live in such darkness and really only Jesus gives true Light to our Lives in Love. We live in such a materialistic world where egotism of worldly power, whether in our families (so many broken families or just parents fighting causing emotional damage in their kids) and our nations so splintered into groups. We so need FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AS LIGHT OF OUR WORLD, but a Faith that is lived in works of healing of divisions and healings of bodies. We pray that we not again (maybe already too late) enter into a Cold War, if not into a violent and deadly real-world war of killing and destroying. I know that Our Lord can make miracles and can use the most evil events to bring about good. But I pray that it is not so worldly destructive as we are seeing in Ukraine at present. Where will it stop? We stand with Pope Francis in prayer daily. We renew our Baptismal vows to work with Jesus to bring respect for human lives and decent living space so that the next generation might have peace and security. This is not political, rather moral, from our FAITH IN JESUS RESURRECTED.

The chapel was full on Holy Saturday night, but again on Sunday morning there were a lot of folks. I just wish it were that way all year long, so many folks who need to strengthen or even to form that relationship with Our God that makes life more Christ-like, more human as God meant for humans to be from the beginning of creation. Real love is only possible with freedom, but we humans have used our freedom for such egotistical purposes. The world is not what it was supposed to be, and the guilt is ours. We stand beside Adam and Eve in their acceptance of the devil's temptation. So easily we go, and I am part of that group at times, just like our world around us.

After Easter, rather late, but better than never, we started our classes of First Communion and Confirmation in the high school. It overwhelmed me when 43 students presented themselves for Confirmation (I expect more yet), with 21 students for First Communion. Actually, I should not have been surprised as there is very little pastoral service in our area apart from our high school (and small kids' dorm). I am so glad to be able to offer this. As I explained last year the books we use are specially made by a priest and a woman religious in the Archdiocese of Santa Cruz, both known to me personally. There was a Latin American symposium (the whole continent) on religious teaching several years back here in Santa Cruz which put much emphasis on more biblical formation. So, these two specialists worked to do just that. Both First Communion and Confirmation catechism books are done as a study into the life of Jesus as presented in the New Testament. The students must read the passage in the New Testament to be able to fill in the blanks. So obligatory to have a New Testament in hand. For me really good! There are crossword puzzles, other types of games, fill-ins, draw pictures, etc. that concentrate on the Person of Jesus, His teaching, and His presence in the Holy Eucharist and our commitment to Jesus as a result of Confirmation. Another value is the books can be worked at home with parents or older brothers and sisters helping the students. I want and urge the kids to do this at home so that the whole family can be affected.

A few more things: We had a specialist from one of the universities in Santa Cruz to come and give us an evaluation on our use of our hydroponic vegetable production (vegetables in a type of greenhouse situation). We are not having the result that we had wished for. It is the Evangelical university, which for me has the best agricultural teaching in the city. The specialist gave us a list of things to do better. We had a plague that was able to enter our area and really needs to be cleaned out with some kind of dis-infectant, among other things.

And a surprise last Friday morning (April 22). A new archbishop was named for Santa Cruz. Actually, our school is in the Archdiocese as I came out here working for the Archdiocese. After I retired from the parish in 2016 I started working in the Vicariate of Camiri, a Franciscan mission area that goes back just over 100 years. The new archbishop is a Bolivian with roots in one of the Indian cultures. First of all, there have been mostly foreign missionaries named bishops and especially archbishops. But never has there been named someone of Indian origin. This will be a blessing for Bolivia and a special gift from Pope Francis. I knew the new archbishop as an auxiliary bishop who was selected first of all by Cardinal Archbishop Julio Terrazas who was a great man here in the early part of this century, also Bolivian but mestizo or mixed blood. Another surprise is that the new archbishop is the youngest of the auxiliary bishops here in Santa Cruz, whom I knew as a rather quiet man, at least in the meetings where I was present years back. He says that he will put more emphasis on his Indian roots and also more attention on the rural apostolate,

really neglected in the last years with the Italian archbishop whom he is replacing.

It is now Saturday, April 30, and I don't want to enlarge this letter with more reflections, as I put so many reflections when talking about Holy Week. I trust and hope that you all there had many blessings also in your celebration of Holy Week. Of course, our religious faith as Christians really stems from the events of Holy Week, when we are able to discover Who Jesus really is, and to be able to put our Faith in this Person as Savior of a broken world, and in His Father and the Holy Spirit Who gives Life too for us that can continue in Life that blossoms after our short time of proofing formation here on earth.

I want to end this letter then with all of you to say THANK YOU for your continued help to us here, a little less in March after so much generosity in the months previous. I recognize that so many of you do not know me other than in the talks I gave now several years back in the various parishes. (I am a third generation native Texan, born and raised in Wise County on a dairy farm, my Catholic faith coming from German immigrants on my mother's side from South Texas, my parents living and meeting on nearby farms northwest of Wichita Falls and eventually marrying in Sacred Heart Church there in 1921). All the more am I grateful to you all which I try to express in these monthly letters. What we do here depends almost totally on you. We are earning a little now on our own, but honestly up to the present it is so far from what we need to continue. We depend on you all there to continue your generosity. We now have just under 1100 students who are building their lives around the studies that they receive from us. Without us the poverty that they have lived in so far in their lives would be also their future. We make the difference with almost all of them. Some 60% to 70% of them come from single mothers who never had a chance to study either and are now abandoned by a father of the kids left at home, leaving all responsibility in the mother's hands. We too are having many problems of no work for so many, and this affects especially those without education. We are their only possibility to have a change in their present reality. All the more do I thank you for your help.

I pray daily for all of you, May Our Lord so bless each and all of you,

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames