

**Father Bob Thames**  
**April 2023 Letter**  
**Cabezas, Bolivia**

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Early (April 27) I am beginning this letter of April, very conscious of Easter that has always influenced me along with Christmas in my vocation and my way of carrying out that vocation, a little different from other people, and even different from many priests, especially here in Latin America. I will try to give a little of each special day of Holy Week that has penetrated me for so long, causing some deepening as the years have passed. I have read several books on life in Palestine at the time of Jesus, been influenced by them in my thinking, the two that most influenced me being Jose Antonio Pagola (Jesus Aproximacion Historica, in Spanish) and Bargil Pixner (Paths of the Messiah, translated from German into English). Each of these I have read and meditated on at least 3 times in their entirety. If you know these you will surely know that they have different views on quite a few things, even important things. This does not bother me as they both present the reality of Jesus as they studied it, and especially Bargil Pixner who lived in Israel for some 40 years and a specialist in the literature of the time of Jesus and just after Jesus' life on earth. For me, this broadens my understanding, knowing that some things we will never know for sure exactly on some details, as it could be this or it could be that. That's good for thinking, for meditation. My interest is more in the Reality of my Faith in Jesus through prayer, His Humanity and Divinity, man of Israel who lived some 30 or so years in our human, worldly reality and at the same time was God Creator. And now Our Savior Who Died for us and Rose in Victory Over Death, His Victory of Eternal Life which He so earnestly wants to share with us.

I begin with Palm Sunday. Jesus on the colt of a beast of burden, not the majestic horse of a victorious conqueror, leading behind him his defeated enemy leaders in chains who would shortly be beheaded. This must have been in the memory of many after the Jewish rebellion of about 6 AD when two thousand Jewish rebels were crucified around Jerusalem after the Roman victory. How different the way Our Lord sees reality is in contrast with our own world of materialism and rapacious fighting. The Victory of God is invisible to human imagination that is external and wants glory to be praised by humans. The victory of humans does not last, passing quickly into memory. The various kings of Israel, especially Herod the Great so craving worldly glory, a vicious and jealous ruler who many of the time of Jesus must have remembered. For Jesus it is the Heart of Love that looks on us weak humans in so much need, a need that is to be solved only with Jesus Giving His Life for our wickedness, we who seek worldly recognition and power over others. The only Real Victory

comes with Power of Grace that conquers our naïve self-centeredness and desire for worldly greatness.

Holy Thursday we remember for the washing of feet of the disciples and the Eucharist. We today don't grasp the demeaning of the washing of feet. At the time of Jesus this was very shameful, as very few wore sandals or shoes, mostly barefoot, so very dirty feet. And in Jewish practice at the time only a pagan slave could be ordered to wash the feet, not a Jewish slave, as the act was too shameful. This is why Peter resisted so strongly. But Jesus was showing what must be the Christian attitude of one believer toward another, not slaves, but loving brothers and sisters caring for one another. This can help us understand a little more the act of Eucharist, giving us His Body and Blood, so far beyond the washing of feet, SERVANT OF TOTAL GIVING OF ONESELF ONLY POSSIBLE BY OUR GOD, not only a cleansing of soul of sin as in Confession, but a GIVING OF LIFE ETERNAL. This is what we receive in each Mass. This invites us, urges us, to be more community on earth, more holy (self-giving) in our families, with greater generosity to those in need. But this Eucharist also directs to understand more the Act of Jesus on Good Friday. Let us see some passages in St. Luke and St. Juan. See in the Gospel of St. Luke 23,33-34, how Jesus forgives those who are crucifying Him, this while He is in such pain. And then in St. Luke 23,39-43, Jesus is forgiving and promising Heaven to the thief who is repenting and asking for forgiveness. Then in St. John 19,25-27. Jesus is thinking of others, this time His Mother Mary and John, the youngest disciple in my opinion. There is a legend that St. John lived past the year 100 AD, eventual dying a natural death. He was condemned to die in boiling oil as a martyr in Ephesus (southwestern Turkey now) but did not die. There is a book written by a French doctor sometime in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, giving an analyst of the pain in the body of those crucified. I don't remember having the book but read some other book quoting the work. It so strikes me that Jesus in such pain of crucifixion, was never thinking of Himself or His pain, only of others. This so often condemns me in my concern for myself, wanting some sympathy from others when I am in a little pain (more often in my older age). But Jesus is only concerned for others, HIS TOTAL GIVING OF HIMSELF FOR ALL OF US. This is what we receive in the Eucharist, HIS BODY AND BLOOD IN TOTAL GIVING ON THE CROSS. That is what hits me almost every time I receive the Eucharist and makes me continue to try to give of myself as long as I can, even at this old age. I can't just stop, no offense to others, just my way of understanding what I am receiving and my need to respond with my own life. It just seems to me what my Faith in Jesus urges me to do. But then comes Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. Surely in the mind of Our God, the two are together. Remember that in the time of Jesus, Saturday ended with sundown and Sunday began at that moment. So, for us the two are the same for the Resurrection. TOTAL LOVE IN GIVING OF ONESELF TO OTHERS BRINGS TOTAL VICTORY OF LIFE THAT ONLY OUR GOD CAN GIVE. This is what the RESURRECTION of JESUS tells us in our faith. This world-life is only a starter, a time of trial, to see how we understand

our existence in reference to Our God, Creator. Jesus in His life on earth is the REAL MODEL, the REAL HUMAN, it is how we were created to live. We all failed in Adam and Eve, that is, we have the same tendencies of selfishness, wanting to decide for ourselves what we want to do with this existence (so openly evident in our world at present), our tendency towards this self-centered and self-glory way of living. In the temptations of Jesus, we see the devil's attempt to bring Jesus into the trap of human failure. But also, we see that Jesus not only did not fail, but now offers us the same victory over this failure, this Power that Flows from Jesus on the Cross to resist failure and Live for Our God Who in Total Love Shares His Victory. May Our Merciful God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, be so merciful to all of us! Our Promise of Life Eternal in Love in Heaven! How can we refuse this offer? May Our Lord Bless all of you! Of course, I had Masses during the week, but a real joy to be among the folks, lots of attendance too, as is in all the world. Just wish that it would be that way all year long. As in many countries attendance is down. For me it is a slow decadence of our Faith. Materialism seems to be beginning to take the place of Faith, the world-over, but with it our morality too is going down, especially seen in family breakups and family violence.

It is now May 2, Tuesday, and I really have not had time to get back to this letter. The end of April saw us finishing the first semester, now with 3 semesters for the year. I am saddened that so many in my house have low grades. That does not mean failing necessarily, but not good either. I was given a list, some with just one or other low grade, others with several subjects lower than it should have been.

The rains have continued, this month more drizzle, but sometimes up to 5 or 6 days without stopping, making work sometimes miserable and even classes. Luckily, it has not been cold, just a little cooler, good for most folks. But for me not so good, who gets cold easily before most others.

For Easter Day, my house with the small kids' dorms, and the workers who must stay with the cows and hogs, had a big feast, cooking all ourselves (not me cooking so no one got sick) this victory of Jesus over death and an invitation for us to follow His Way of Life of Love. It turned out well.

I might have told this before, 3 young women under my responsibility are taking a course in the city on desert making. This course is on Saturday AM for 4 hours. So, we have beautifully decorated and good-tasting desserts, which are good for our celebrations. What looks good does help the taste somewhat, more so with the small kids. Several on Easter had more dessert than they could eat, so carried the leftovers of their second serving of cake with fruit salad back to their house near the public school.

I end this letter again asking for your continued help, maybe less in amount than before, but hopefully faithfully as we try to be more self-supporting. We do

indeed need this help now. We cut our need for outside help to almost one half of two years ago. But we are not there yet. May Our Lord bless your generosity.

My prayers are daily for all of you there,  
your brother in Jesus Christ,  
Fr. Bob Thames

***We are volunteers supporting ETC Bolivia. The current contact information at the Diocese of Fort Worth to continue to support the children is: Dianna Rhoads (817) 533-3174 or via e-mail at [DRhoads@adv-fdn.org](mailto:DRhoads@adv-fdn.org) The following link takes you directly to the Diocese ETCB web page for easiest access to donate on-line: <https://fwdioc.org/educate-the-children-bolivia> . Please reply to this e-mail if we may answer any questions.***