

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter May 2018

Family all of you there, Greetings! I hope this finds all of you well and doing good. Here is the monthly letter for May.

Today is June 2, Saturday, and I will just start this letter as shortly, at 11:45 AM I will leave to go to give 3 Masses in small towns to the southwest of here. Earlier than usual as I want to visit some homes, especially in one of the villages. I do miss the pastoral work that has taken most of my priesthood years, being in homes, sharing whatever they want to offer, food, drink, conversation, I mostly just listen. I have a good stomach that never has been sick because of what I have eaten. I remember drinking a type of kool aid given in the Altiplano (high plains above 13,000 ft.) in 1982. These were very hard times during the military takeover of the country and much poverty and almost no transportation to the city where products could be obtained. A young girl about 16 and taking courses with a young woman who worked with me had gotten a package of kool aid. I don't know how, but she was really proud of it and when I came to visit her family, she mixed it with water from the spring where the village got their water. There was trash and some dirt which was very visible in the drink, but I drank it so as not to disappoint her. I remember Jesus said not to worry about this in the Gospel, eating whatever was put before me, or even snake-bites (Mark 16, 18 and Luke 10, 7). I have taken Jesus at His Word and done well. For me it is a sign that I am accepted by the people as one of them. The only real sickness for me has been the heart attacks caused by my own pushing myself beyond my physical limits. This is my own false pride; I caused it. I can't blame it on anyone else, but never for eating or drinking whatever was put before me.

It is now Sunday, June 3, and the Masses went well, even though we had a cold front (only 52 degrees) come through with clouds and a small cold wind. People still came out as all of our places of Masses are either out in the open or just under a roof with sides open. Going back to May the big day in May is Mothers' Day on May 27. Our school celebrated the event on Monday, May 28 with some folk dancing and other activities that high light the Mothers who were able to come. Also in May the first report cards were given out. In my house most of the kids did OK, 3 were very good, and 3 were terrible. Fortunately there are 3 more semesters to bring up those failing. We will see if there is the will to do so. One young girl at 15 has a very bad family situation, one of those failing terribly. I have invited her to stay more with us and less at home. Her low grades were because she has missed so much school, even weeks at a time. I will see how this goes now with her. The kids for whom I am responsible (given me by the child defense office) all did OK; one was part of the 3 best. The other two best ones are from families who live way into the mountains and rarely if ever go home except on longer vacations. They are all the more intent on doing something with their lives. One of the helps for the kids in my house is the use of my computer and internet that allows investigations into things. Every day in the afternoon and evening my computer is in use, usually with two to six persons working together. And with the laptop given by Keith Dugas that is also connected with the desktop, there is another group using that one. I am glad that even the 6th primary grade

has assigned work to do on internet. It will give them a head start for university or technical institute study. Most of our public high schools which have computers charge the students for computer classes as the government does not have a salary for computer teachers yet. Poorer families can't afford it for their kids. This amazes me in our world of today, and Bolivia being advanced in so many other ways. I will be part of a push with the district superintendent and other persons to get the municipal government to help fund computers and computer teachers at least in all high schools (7th to 12th). Our school has had computers and teachers since 2008 but we got the computers and we pay the teacher, the only teacher without a government salary.

I would like to explain something here that helps understand why Eastern Bolivia (Santa Cruz area) is ahead of other places in some aspects (my opinion only). The oil and gas production in Bolivia is mainly in the Santa Cruz Dept. (state) and the revenue from this is divided into national, state (department), and municipal governments). The largest gas field is just now being put into production and a fight was over the location of this field. An independent study by a Canadian firm showed the field was totally in the Santa Cruz state which means that our share will be larger. There was a fight with the neighboring state, and our municipal Gov. Head (alcalde or mayor by name) led the charge along with several civic leaders to have the national government to start releasing the funds from the production. (Because of political pressure the national Gov. had withheld the funds until the issue was more settled). I hope to plead before the municipal council now and before the mayor himself to use a part of this revenue to fund computer teachers, and buy computers for those high schools that yet do not have them. The newly elected president (as well as the past president) of the campesino organization as well as the head of the Guaraní people have kids in our schools. They all support us in this move which gives us more leverage. I see this as a moral stance (not political) as it causes the kids of poorer families not to have computer classes. This may seem strange to many of you there in the U. S. where there are computers even in the first grade of elementary school, but here it is more a rarity. It is not only getting computers but maintaining them, a costly thing also. Some very good news for us this past month. We had our first teachers' workshop to better their teaching ability. This comes from the Fe y Alegría association, even though it is not sure that we will be admitted fully into that organization yet. We should know something more definite by next week. Fe y Alegría is a private association of schools that combine together to have various types of service that benefits the schools. It was started by the Jesuits here in Bolivia, but I believe it is present in other countries of South America. We had put in our application last October 2017, but the application was lost somewhere in La Paz. The new head of the Santa Cruz office found a copy of the application and sent it in. The national head of Fe y Alegría will be in Santa Cruz next week and our application will be brought up, to see what are our possibilities of entering. They offer quite a few services but the one that most interests me is the workshops for teachers. There is a workshop for students also, and when the teachers were given one, there was also one for the students. Both were well received by our teachers and students, so our hopes are for full approval. Actually the district superintendent asked to have the teachers of the neighboring public schools allowed into the workshop, which was accepted. So about 110 teachers came to the workshop which was held in our new

auditorium...our first official use of it. Talking with the head of the Santa Cruz office, she told me that it depends on the teachers now putting into practice what they learned in the workshops. My hope is to have at least two more before the school year is out.

I have told before of a psychologist now finishing up his master's degree, but living with us and working with students and teachers. His final test will be June 11 or 13. Then as expected he will easily pass this final exam, then he will put in his application for a university teaching position with a private university in Santa Cruz. He also hopes to find a lot to build a house on this side of Santa Cruz on the highway to Cabezas. This was very good news for us as it means he will remain close to us and continue to help us. I am particularly interested in helping the junior and senior classes determine what area of work (so study that prepares them for the work) that they are interested in but also could be good in. It does bother me to hear of students leaving here not knowing what to do next. Worse still are those still wandering around after several years after leaving here. Family life especially influences that, as I am very much aware. 3 kids given to me from one of the worst family situations possible have helped convince me of this need. Two have finished our high school, and have yet to find themselves in their adult life. The second one we might yet be able to salvage and the third will graduate in 2019. We are aware of their lack and working on that. We also need to help others in this.

We had some good luck with our soy bean harvest, keeping more than a ton for us in our kitchen for food (soy milk, meat balls, hamburger patties, etc.). With some pride I will say that our soy milk in my opinion is better than what is sold in stores in the U. S. Ours is white like good milk and good tasting (my opinion). The rest of the harvest we sold for a little over \$3000. Our field should have produced double that, but I was told that it would have produced double with chemical fertilizer, which we do not use being ecologically organic (no chemicals of any type). But as many of you know (especially those of farm background) soybeans are a legume which of itself fertilizes the soil putting in nitrogen by its roots. We are using soy beans, ordinary beans, and maybe later peanuts, as legumes in rotating our crops with corn and sorghum maize, and potatoes, and other vegetables. For a reflection I would like to present something which may seem very academic for most of you, but actually does affect the life of the Church in so many ways without us knowing it most of the time. We just finished celebrating Pentecost Sunday the end of May which saw the newly born Church begin to organize inwardly in Jerusalem (Acts 1 to 6 and Ch. 15), then shoot outward, especially forced by persecution after the death of St. Stephen in Acts 7 and 8 and all the work of St. Paul to Acts 28. The two movements for me are both works of the Holy Spirit, necessary for the continued inward rejuvenation and outward movement towards a world in ever greater need of God Whom seems to be more and more set aside unconsciously as wealth and pleasure take greater place or even thrown aside by so many atheists of today and officially by some atheist governments. Both elements are necessary, and for me, must exist side by side, but in actual practice often find one element more dominant than the other mostly depending on the head of the parish, or diocese, or world Church. As the Church is divinely given what God has given in Jesus Christ must be always preserved. Yet at the same time the world changes and the needs of believers challenges us to meet those changes. New methods and new ideas arise, some

good and some not so good. As time goes on the new situations and ideas must be considered, accepted or purified to be in conformity with what Christ has given or rejected in some elements. At the same time we as believers must go out, meet those new situations, never afraid of encountering these situations and offering our Faith as an essential element of modern life. Some of our ways of meeting those new situations will be deficient and need to be purified. This is the role of authority in the Church. Other ways will be exactly what Jesus is inspiring us to do correctly and will eventually be approved by the Authority given by Jesus Christ. These two elements (**inturning to maintain** and **outgoing to offer to our world and its problems what God has given in Jesus Christ**) are both necessary and will be a cause of tension in the Church. But my own experience is that both are necessary for good Catholic Life. Never being afraid to go out to meet new situations and never being afraid of taking time to examine our path to see how it compares to what Jesus has given. In the last letter I presented my own way of inturning in direct contact with Our God, as well as reading Church documents, both Papal and Council, as well as local Bishops' Conference and local Bishops' letters. But I am of the adventuresome type, always going out, mixing in our world, reading a lot, trying new ideas that try to meet new situations, being on the edge one might say. (I hope this makes sense to all of you, not too complicated. I am appealing to Church unity in all of this when I see unnecessary tensions arise.)

May Our God Bless all of you who continue to help us offer our Catholic services to a world in need.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames

The names of the 3 students whose photos appear below are (top to bottom) Felicia Revollo age 14, 9th grade, Fatima Bravo age 16, 11th grade and Ismael Seas age 15, 10th grade.



