

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter
May 2019

Dear Family, All,

Greetings Here is the May letter. May Our Lord Bless all of you there.

It is now the first day of June, rainy and cool here this morning after one or two days of sun this week. Just like so much of the U. S. rain is on the agenda this year. Thank Goodness here at least not the floods that so much of the U. S. has been victim. Ours is normal for this time of year, a slow drizzle for two to three days. All of this soaks in, not hardly any run-off, but leaves the dirt roads difficult to drive through. And it also makes it impossible to get into the field for any harvest or planting. Luckily this year we have harvested our soy beans and corn. Just lost our silage of sorghum maize which turned bad from a mold on the leaves for so much constant wet weather.

I arrived back from the U. S. on May 22, just as a cold wind began to blow from the south. It was rain in Cabezas as had been for a few days. I was really glad to get back, to see the kids again and to be with them. The school is running well although the report cards had just been given for the first semester. All was not well in my house on that score. Several kids had had attacks of laziness, some even missing quite a few classes, and their report cards showed all of that with low grades. I have had talks with each one of the bad grades students in my house. Hopefully next semester will be much better. The worst one is a senior this year and has been with me since the first grade, an orphan, the youngest of 3 kids that came to me way back in 2008 or 9, not sure which. His two older sisters have graduated and are living, working, and studying in the city. One of the characteristics of the family because of their very unstable home life is the difficulty of having goals to which they strive until arriving at it. They begin something, but stop after a year or so, then begin something else. The two girls, if they continue, should finish accounting institutes this December. Pray for them to do so. But I must add to all of this that most of the kids are doing well, some even better than I expected. Actually some are some of the best in their classes. This may be surprising as most are from difficult family circumstances or live way in the boondocks where education in primary grades was very poor. The two best students in my house are precisely from the mountains to the west-northwest of here, far from any school and their only transportation was by walking to the small schoolhouses where the

professor failed one or two days a week. He or she had to walk also, making it hard to be present all week long.

There are now 43 kids in my house, too many to give much individual attention. Myself and Clementina, a university nurse, who takes over when I am not here, ride herd, doing the best we can. Clementina lives in the building where the kids are, not so myself, who treasures my silence and being alone, who lives about 60 feet away in my own place. In our office that is connected to my living quarter, there is an extra computer connected to internet that is used daily by the kids doing homework. I was at first surprised that the professors gave so much homework to do using internet, but to see so many kids, even relatively poorer kids, having telephones with internet, I began to understand. In my house there is a printer so it makes all easier just to copy what they want. Daily and into the night someone or several are there doing investigations assigned by one or more professors.

We continue with our technical courses which are an essential part of the national education system in all of Bolivia. As I have said many times before the government passed a law in 2011, without funding it. Slowly it is coming along. Most of our technical courses now have government paid salaries. I think I pay only two of the six courses that our school offers. There is another problem in the regular public schools, this being having students who attend. This year the professors were assigned to public schools and there were not enough students assisting in the classes to maintain the teacher. This was our problem at the beginning, years back, not so much now.

Right after I returned the teachers of our immediate area had another teacher workshop to better their teaching. This was put at my insistence. I have noted that it is only our section that has these workshops (called our nucleus of schools, those schools closest to Cabezas). The other schools in our whole district, I believe, have not had them. We may lose a day of teaching, but gain more with better teaching. Better yet for the professors they receive credit for their curriculum vitae for future employment.

I see with so much sadness in the news of the latest shooting incident in Virginia Beach. I can only think of the large number of broken or dysfunctional families. Unstable people come from unstable homelife (my opinion). I know that it is only a small percentage of these kids who will grow up to do such terrible violence, but it only takes one or two ever so far apart to create fear in our whole society. We just never know when and what to expect each day we live our normal routines. I pray daily for our whole world and especially for our

Diocese of Fort Worth. It was this area that has housed my family for generations, my Dad's family arriving after the Civil War in 1867, and my Mom's family came up from a German community in South Texas in 1910. They married in Sacred Heart Church in Wichita Falls in 1921 and lived almost all their married lives within its boundaries. I was the second child baptized in the new parish of Decatur in 1938. A younger sister of my Mom was a Sister of Namur for some 69 years, serving many in our area in schools and at last as a nurse. It is this area and its people of Faith that gave me Faith and let me grow into the person I am. I am indebted to this area, so I owe it much prayer. May Our Loving Lord so protect our area from such senseless destruction of sacred, God-given life.

I hope to get this letter off today or tomorrow (Sunday, May 2) as I will go on retreat for this coming week Monday to Friday, assisted by a Jesuit priest friend of mine of many years who now lives in Santa Cruz.

But something else to tell is a retreat of students who are studying for their First Communion and Confirmation (some 60 students in all) at the end of this school year. There are classes of an hour and a half each Monday and these retreats of 8 hours each, the last Friday of each month. These retreats are held in our retreat center beside the river west of Cabezas at Abapö. This was just yesterday, a day of rain and cool enough for a coat. This will give them close to 100 hours of class and reflection for the whole course. I went only for the final celebration and a little before to see how things were going, to get a sense of what was happening so I could talk along the same line. The cold and rain did cut some of the assistance, but it seemed a good response from the kids who went.

Something that has been on my mind these last weeks is the question of exactly what is MISSION? It first must be noted **that we are followers of Jesus Christ first and foremost** and it is **our baptism into Jesus Christ that makes us part of this Church called Catholic or universal. This relationship with Jesus Christ is our essence, our very heart of Church. Jesus is our model, our Rule of Life**, as Jesus so strongly stated in St. John 14,6. But the MISSION of Jesus which is a norm for our Church is precisely spelled out in St. Luke 4, 18-21. The passage was fulfilled in Jesus' Life, and is the most important norm for our own. This is also our mission as believers, who proclaim ourselves as His followers. We can go further, reading St. Matthew 25,31-46, the clear-cut passage that tells us how our lives as believers will be judged, how Our God will evaluate how we have followed Jesus Christ. St. James goes into more detail in St. James' epistle ch. 2,14-26. Then

go further to the first epistle of St. John 3,11-18. Laying down our lives for others is the norm of our own following of Jesus Christ, to love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. So if Jesus concerned Himself about the physical condition of those around him, it must be the same for us who profess to be followers. Then for us Mission must include taking care of those physical needs as well as spiritual needs. One cannot be treated without the other. A good example is Matthew 9,1-8. The whole person is created by God, so loved by God in all their dimensions. God is never partial, nor can we be partial. This is seen in the whole history of missionary work of the Catholic Church.

As I talked in parishes about the founding of the small community of Cabezas in 1769, gathering around a group of Indian villages that were located by the river. The Diocesan priest, Padre Jose Mariscal, built a small church and a school for boys and a school for girls. These schools basically were not writing and arithmetic, but simple ways to live better, take care of animals, cook, sew, grow food plants. This almost exclusively as the people had their own language so could not learn Spanish so easily. But the frequent droughts and floods made living difficult because living only by hunting and gathering was their way of life. They needed ways to live all year long without worry. It was this that attracted others to the Faith, seeing the way taught to new villagers. So other Indians throughout the area began asking for Missions in their villages as well. After two years the Franciscan Friars took over, and did colossal work. It is interesting to note that this group of Indians was never conquered in war by the Spaniards. It was the Missions that brought this group of Indians to be part of the society of the time. One can read all of this in the Franciscan Archives that are in Tarija, Bolivia, copies of which I have that concerns our immediate area. Christ-given Mission is always directed to the whole person and the persons' society. Study the Life of Jesus to see His method of Living and Acting.

I could add another story about Mongolia that I have talked about in sermons in the U. S. The Catholic Church was invited into Mongolia I believe in 1990 or 1991 by the new civilian government. The Church sent missionaries from India, Philippines, and South Korea, all Asian. One of those from South Korea was a member of the Secular Institute of Diocesan priest to which I belong (Prado, we who take a personal vow to work with the poor, but to live as the poor as Jesus so lived in His time and His place). The group of new missionaries entered into the capital city of Mongolia, not first building churches nor other religious centers to instruct in the Faith. They began by gathering up the street kids and others who needed a roof and daily food, some

education, then went on to start serving the sick. After some 8 to 9 years the Catholic group had so many people wanting to join the Church that they could hardly handle the crowd of interested folks. By the end of the century a young married couple of Mongolia, very much alive in God, was sent to Rome to study the Faith so as to return as natives believers. This all appeared in a Maryknoll magazine some years back. We could all learn much from this. It is the FACE OF THE GOD OF MERCY AS REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST'S LIFE AND WORK THAT ATTRACTS AND CONVERTS, THIS TOUCHES THE HEART OF PEOPLE, (hear Pope Francis), not our feeble words and pious emotional elocutions that have some people come looking for self-interest if they see some possibilities of gain, or some emotional uplift that lasts a little while. But so many lives do not change in any depth and so many folks continue to live just like the major portion of our world, pagan as Pope Francis called the world, more a worshiper of money and material benefits than true imitators of Jesus Christ Who Gives All, only asking that we too love one another. How Simple to understand and So Difficult to live!

Thanks to all of you who help us, we keep going in service to the poor of our area, an ever expanding area at that. I pray daily for all of you. Please do the same for us here.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames