

Father Bob Thames' end of May 2024 letter from Cabezas, Bolivia, follows below. Please use the [link at the end](#) of the letter for easiest access to the on-line donation page.

Greetings to all of you there who receive this letter. I hope and pray that all goes well with all of you. This is the 31st of May, a beautiful day here, much warmer than the past 20 days or so, windy, dry, a sun that warms us and makes a person want to get outside a little after the cold we have had.

The first activity that seems more important this month was last Monday, 27 of May. This is a grand feast here, Mothers' Day here in Bolivia. A group of women in the war for independence back around 1820 to 1825 in a battle around Cochabamba (central Bolivia, about 6000 ft. altitude), for lack of men soldiers, took of arms to fight the Spanish soldiers. The leader of this group of women whose name I think is Bartolina Sisa, led the women on this day. The schools especially take this day as a celebrative day for mothers and women teachers. We here in the school have taken the day to be a chance to honor mothers (so many single mother families struggling to educate their kids without help from the fathers who have joined with another woman and do not help their former spouse). We had folk dancing, food (some given and other for sale), and tributes of different kinds for mothers. One most impressive presentation was from a young boy student who has a really good voice singing for the mothers. Last year he sang with the accompaniment of a voice on tape, but this year he did all the singing with just music from a tape. WOW! Was it good! This year we also had a presentation of our products from our technical courses (a trades-day like Bowie). It was a cold day, around 58 degrees which is very cold for us here. I had asked several days before to have the day changed until today, Friday, May31, which was forecasted to be warm, but the school principal told me that all information and invitations had been sent out along with many radio announcements. So we stayed the course. Actually, many people came, also because the first semester report cards would be given out to parents, a huge incentive for attendance. The crowds filled our basketball court stands, probably 200 or more folks to see our kids in clothes of the folk dancing

attire, some in bare feet. But to my knowledge no one got sick from it all.

Another day that is special here in Bolivia was in the same week, which was Corpus Christi Feast Day, the Thursday of this same week (yesterday). Here in Bolivia, at least in the past a very Catholic population, had made this day a national holiday, so a day free from work for most labor. It is a day also with no school, but with permission from the district superintendent (local school authority) we were permitted to have school on Thursday and have Friday (today) free so the kids could go home and have a long weekend. I will have more to say on this Feast later in the letter. Actually, as Thursday was a holiday here, we transferred the Friday classes to Thursday.

Our Friday classes are one half day except for some 11th grade students, meaning that the 12th grade students were free. So, we had our second retreat in the afternoon for our second marriage reflection day for the seniors. Rather than go to our big space chapel in Abapó, we held the retreat here in our auditorium, a bit warmer and close by so no need to use time in travel. I have exclaimed so many times the need for much formation on good marriages because of the atmosphere in the world all over for so many marriages that become violent and others broken, leaving their kids with emotional scares that will be carried all their lives. This was good, even though a little cold, ending with a short adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, even though there were a good number of non-Catholics. Prayer is universal and it turned out well. The Eucharist for me is Jesus Humble Servant giving Himself for our world, bringing the Grace of God Visibly to our forgetting world. We so need the Force of Grace to battle our paganistic, material-orientated society. If we could only penetrate more into our Faith to find Jesus so present, so wanting to help! It is the Eucharist that has so helped me in pastoral work that keeps me going now. May Our God help the kids here as they leave to begin their own lives in a world that has many customs and values different from the Faith Jesus gave.

Also, this past week we were able to buy some more milk cows, after selling a good number of our other cows. I grew up on a dairy farm, used to cows milking for some 9 years or more. Not so for most cows in Bolivia. Many milk cows here will give milk for some 3 years, at most 4. I do not know why. But there is a huge dairy farm to the northeast here with cows that will give milk some 8 to 9 years. They have technical advantages, experimenting with trained people, trying this and that over the years that have helped them to this point. And the owners are very Catholic. Knowing what we do here led them to offer us good quality cows at a lesser price. So, we were able to buy some 7 cows. Actually, in previous years we had to buy some few cows every year to cover those which were turning dry. Only two of the cows were giving milk right now, the other 5 are expecting to give birth and start producing milk within two months or less. But the morning after arriving here, another cow gave birth. Her calf will suck, and the cow will be giving milk for us in a day or two. Our milk cans here are 20-liter cans (a liter is just a little more than a quart jar), which are the most common around us. The two cows that were milking filled a milk can at once. I would like to get to the point of having some 10 cans (200 liters) or even 500 liters. This would help us greatly in our effort to be more self-supporting. Of course we have to learn to sell also.

Now June 3, Monday: Like the world over we too here have had weather changes, like others to our detriment. I had written before about the lack of rain this year (all our rainy season from October of last year to mid-April this year.) The drought continues and now entering our winter dry season we just have to think that there will be no more rain, until perhaps October this year. We just keep praying, hoping that somehow things might change, and it could rain somehow. But just looking over to Brazil in its southern part across from Paraguay there have been terrific floods and over 100 people have died in this. It just seems so extreme, drought or floods, no middle ground as in past times. I must admit though we are able to go forward more than most of the folks around here. We have three places on our land with some limited irrigation, the 3 areas which are maybe just a little more than an acre and a half each. One area is close to the big river, another close to a small stream that flows out of the mountains that seems not to fail, the

other near a well that was dug years back without use until now and the time we put it to use. If we would use these 3 areas, we could have 3 crops a year, each with irrigation. We will have to see if we are up to it. We don't always respond as we ought. I can't complain about our land in the mountains. We had several rains there and we will start the corn harvesting this week and it will produce some extra corn that we can sell to help pay costs. We also produced more silage this year than any other year up to now in the mountains. (We have two large silos that can hold up to 1300 sacks of corn or more. We may just sell what goes over this, to not provide food for the abundant rats here. If we just store up some in sacks, our numerous cats are not up to the task of controlling the situation.

Tuesday, June 4: I would now like to put a reflection into this letter. I do not know why except Our Lord put it all into my mind this year more than other times. It struck me hard this year how Our God is as Family, going further, a Family of Total Love. The Most Blessed Trinity is FAMILY in a Divine sense, Father, Son, Holy Spirit as revealed by Jesus. According to St. Atanasio (not sure of the spelling in English, Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt in the first part of the 4th century) all Grace is given by the Father, by means of the Son, in the Holy Spirit). Then the Son Jesus was born into a Human Family (Mary and Joseph, selected by God, sanctified by Holy Grace, which is God's Love Given, to be The Holy Family as we know today.

I recall years back when I was pastor at Breckenridge, I came to know a Jewish family, whose Dad, native first of Holland, had escaped with his family from the Nazi's by small boat over to England. He, now a grandfather, wanted his grandkids to understand the importance of the Passover in our own time. All his kids with their families returned each year to his house to celebrate the Passover as a large family, telling of how he with his family escaped as the early Jews from the slavery of Egypt. How God was so involved in his own Passover to be where he was in Breckenridge at the time. He told us that his family celebration would last some 5

hours, living out various circumstances, in part as games for the grandkids, but with explications to understand the meaning.

As all of you know, the Mass as we know it today in Our Faith was given to us by Jesus Christ in a Feast of Passover with the Apostles on Holy Thursday, the day before His Death on Good Friday, then His Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Our Catholic Mass, the Feast of Corpus Christi or Body of Christ which makes Sacramentally Present Our Lord Jesus, giving to our world Salvation that lasts into eternity. I like to go back to the first 300 years of the Church when most Masses were celebrated in homes hidden from the Roman authorities, called then House (family) Churches at the time in some history books.

I personally see our world today in some kind of slavery of materialism. Pope Francis has said the god today is money, basically the same as materialism. We are so caught up in things of this world, that the World with God, Heaven, forming a holy family immersed in Love as Jesus lived as Model for us to live out, seems almost forgotten. All the more important our celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday with our families, to learn from Jesus as seen in His Passion and Death on the Cross, His TOTAL LOVING, GIVING HIMSELF. This Grace given from the Cross makes it possible for us to live as Jesus, at least as far as we are open to His Grace/Life. I just want all to think about praying as a family at least once a week if not more, maybe reading a passage from Christ's Suffering and Death, (maybe the Sunday Gospel) but there are many other passages too that show Jesus in real Life, thinking only of others' need. The final result will be a happier family, more dedicated to generosity to one another, more patience and kindness. Believe me, I have seen it in families during these last 60 years of my priesthood. Our God does not fail, just given a small opening. I concentrate on the family from which the next generation of our world leaders will come. We believers must have a special role today, not so much talking, but more as LIVING EXAMPLES.

Please don't forget us here. I write about our efforts to be more self-supporting, but we are far from that. We are making so many efforts, searching, talking with various groups, but no real path has

been opened up so far. We need your help to continue for so many whose future lives depend on us here. You are all prayed for each day, those I know, by name, but asking God's Blessing on you all who receive this letter.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames

(Sorry, my last reflection is unclear, just want to emphasize that the Family is the starting point for a new world in Our Family God. You all are so important for the future)

We are volunteers supporting ETC Bolivia. The current contact information at the Diocese of Fort Worth to continue to financially support the children is: Dianna Rhoads (817) 533-3174 or via e-mail at: DRhoads@adv-fdn.org

The following link takes you directly to the Diocese ETC-B web page for easiest access to donate on-line:
<https://fwdioc.org/educate-the-children-bolivia>

To donate by paper check, make it payable to: Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth. On the memo line, please write, "For ETC-Bolivia, Fr. Thames Mission". Mail it to: Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76108-2919. Please reply to this e-mail if we may answer any questions.