

Fr. Bob Thames June 2019 Letter

To all of you there, I hope and pray that all goes well there. Here is the June letter.

It is now the second day of July and just now I am sitting down to begin this letter. A lot has gone on in this past month, but a good bit of it is difficult to tell. I am talking about things that are yet “probable” although it does look more positive than negative, things that will help us move toward a sustainment of our schools from Bolivia in the long run. I am amazed with the support expressed with some folks in the state and the municipal governments with whom I have met several times. We are known and valued, recognized for what has taken place these last 16 years in Cabezas. I must say that all of this has been God’s Work, an Act of Mercy that only Our Lord could have done, too much for human activity. It is Our God Who has done so much and our Debt of Thanks to Our Creator, and Thanks to all of you who have responded to God’s Action in yourselves helping us to do all that has been done. You realize that more than 1000 folks have received their high school diplomas. Also a young girl who graduated from here, now a grown woman, daughter of a single mother, is now a medical doctor who has returned to her home town of Abapó to serve in the small hospital there. And how many others who have fine-tuned their talents to give service to the world around them. Only Our God could have done all of this, and we and you all have been so blessed by being allowed to be a part of it. MAY OUR GOD BE PRAISED ALWAYS IN AND BY OUR LIVES!

I personally took advantage of the first part of June to make a spiritual retreat with a Jesuit friend of mine, now for many years, just two years my senior. This was in the second week for 5 days. It was for me a real Blessing; I came out relaxed and refreshed. Thank all of you who pray for me and for all of us. God’s Grace was at work in me. Just after the retreat we had the Olympics of the grade school students in the district. I don’t remember of any of my kids who participated in it (there are 5 grade school kids in my house). But the second week of June had the provincial high school Olympics here in Cabezas, with some 6 different districts gathered here. You might recall that our events of this type are not just sports (track, Ping-Pong, volleyball, chess, etc.), but also include academic contests in math, chemistry, and science. I was surprised to find my name on the program to give the Blessing of God on the whole event. This was the district superintendent’s work as she often surprises me that way. Then the last week of June the whole western area of the state of Santa Cruz was held in a city near Santa Cruz. We had some 56 students who had won in their events and participated. Now there remains only the state and the national event. You might recall from last year one of our students, by his first name Watico (yes, that is his first name), won the national 100 meter run by a couple of yards ahead of second place. I don’t know it about this year as no one has told if he will be going on to state and nationals this year or not. My point to telling all of this is that our classes suffered a lot in the month of June, more than a week of days without classes. Even our professors complained of so much class missed. I now see a lot of social benefit in that there are so many strong ethnic groups in Bolivia who do not mix so easily. These events help a lot in that area, one of the reasons that they are held as I found out this year, given as part the reason for doing all of this. I did not know this before, but now see the benefit that before I just complained about. We are really going ahead full throttle on the hydroponic (the type of greenhouse mentioned before that uses little water with nutrients and no soil to grow vegetables). We started building one with steel construction, but were told by a specialist in

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this at the state level that it would be more intelligent to use tree materials that the villagers have at their disposal and are more likely to use if they are convinced to making one of their own. So we will have both types. Actually both are on their way. Our hope is that this will be a good part of our self-sustainment from two points: 1) producing food for our kitchen and 2) being able to sell some to help pay salaries. This last amount could be significant. In this same line, just yesterday, July 1, I went with one of the municipal council members of the same political party as the state government and a friend of the people in that government. It turned out really well, with the good possibility of getting help to build up to 2000 square meters of hydroponic for us. We would do the labor and some posts from our trees, and the bought materials would be brought by the state government. We will return on Thursday, July 4, (HAPPY HOLIDAY CELEBRATION TO ALL OF YOU THERE) to see if it all can become reality. A little prayer from all of you will help! Not just in this issue, but in all that we do here! I see that ultimately to take full advantage of the hydroponic, we will need a company here that cans (put into cans) vegetables to sell outside the country. This would guarantee a constant market for local benefit and help our world in need of food, as it helps us to maintain our educational efforts. I have read that by 2040 there will be a severe crisis in food production as our world population continues to grow, especially in poorer areas of our world, and the food produced will not go around to all. Lots of farm land world-wide is going to cities and industry so less farm land. Just look at the very good farm land in the metropolitan area of Dallas-Fort Worth, now all urban. Bolivia is one country that now does and will continue to produce more than it can consume. We just may be part of the solution (can you imagine that our schools, our kids, could well be a part of all of that, probably not known by others except by Our All-knowing God). THIS IS WHAT GRACE DOES SO WONDERFULLY AND FEW HUMANS NOTICE!

June 28, the last Friday of June was the start of our winter vacation, two weeks, with school starting again on July 15. But this year is different. Cabezas is celebrating 250 years of its existence, having been founded by a catholic priest from Santa Cruz, Padre Jose Mariscal by name, who in 1769 came to gather a small group of Indian villages that existed separately alongside the Rio Grande River, just below the present old town where our school now is. He made a chapel and a school for boys and a school for girls. We are a part of that continued tradition of our Catholic Faith, not just talking about Faith, but with works that manifest our Faith in action, or as Pope Francis says in his encyclical of 2018, letting our Faith take flesh with works. (See paragraph 37, also first epistle of St. John 3,14-18, and St. James' epistle 2,14-17, see Jesus' own words about His Life on earth, recognized as the Messiah by His works in Matthew 11, 2-6). The town has asked our schools to have a major part of the celebration, so a good number of our kids will return on July 10 to help us prepare for the event of 4 days, starting July 13 until July 16, the actual day of the Feast, the Feast of Our Lady of Carmen. More on this in the July letter.

Now another important thing for July 4th, but here in Bolivia. Remember Noelia, the young student here who had her right leg cut off just below the knee because of a degenerative bone disease that was coming up her leg bone? With her other leg crippled at the ankle? She will have her left leg fixed by an operation on the morning of July 4th, with the leg bone being put into her foot bones (which leg bone now runs to the side of the foot). Then the protesis of her

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right leg will be made to be a perfect match for her left leg, so that she will be walking by August. SEE HOW OUR GOOD GOD SO WORKS!

Always I have put my own reflections into the letters, but now reading a book of reflections by Pope Francis published in a book by Sterling Publishers, New York. The name of the book is "Pope Francis". I found the book in Half Price Books for a very cheap price. I am using the book for meditation in my chapel. This reflection is centered on migrants, so much in the news today, in the U. S. and around the world. The quotes are centered in the person of Jesus Christ. I highly recommend the book if you can find it. (Pages 48-49 and page 40, here paraphrased, put somewhat in my way of saying things, so as not to quote exactly).

Jesus Christ is the pastor of the Church, but it is we believers who are His visible Presence in history, so He passes through the freedom of us human beings. There is the Vicar of Christ, the successor of St. Peter, but it is always Jesus Christ Who remains the center. Jesus Christ is the point of all reference, the very heart of the Church. Without Jesus, Peter and the Church would not exist, would not even have reason to exist. Jesus Christ died and rose once for all, this means for everyone in the world—totally universal, but the power of the Resurrection, this Passover from the slavery to do evil to the freedom to do only good, this must be brought about in each person in every age, what all of us live out each day. How many dry deserts and how many foreign lands must be crossed by human beings searching for a decent existence? But is this not for the most part the desert within each of us where the love of God and neighbor is lacking, when we fail to be guardians of neighbor and guardians of earth that Our Loving Lord has given us? If we turn to God's merciful presence then we with God can make even the driest field become a garden, can bring life to the driest of bones. THIS IS WHAT THE PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST IN OUR DAILY LIVES MAKES POSSIBLE! LET'S GET WITH OUR GOD TO BRING ALL OF THIS ABOUT!

May Our Lord bless each of you there who read this, as my gratitude for your continued help to us here.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames