

## Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter June 2021

Greetings to all of you there! I hope and pray that disease has not reached any of you and that all are well. Here in Bolivia, we had a 4-week winter vacation that normally is 2 weeks. Bolivia is getting into the vaccination program and is now down to all teachers and to those who are 30 or over, even in Cabezas. This includes most of our workers for their first shot.

Interestingly enough the really cold winter weather hit just as school was starting again. We had some real summer weather during most of the school vacation. Actually, summer weather in our vacation is more normal than the cold that we have at present. This morning the thermometer just inside my house (with a crack in the wall to let the cold outside come in to register the outside temperature) read about 43 or 44 degrees on your register, 6 degrees our way of registering. This is a change from last year when we had the hottest winter on record for here, as in other parts of the world. But this cold this week also brought rain, so gladly welcomed on Sunday. We have had some misting rain several times, but this time it was for real, several downpours that add up. We have about 11 hectares (about 26 acres) of sorghum maize planted and if it doesn't freeze we will have a lot more silage, necessary for our milk cows.

Now along with the rain more good news! Yesterday, 28 June, we had a visit of the regional sub-governor of our area. Let me explain a little of the setup of the political system on the more local level. Our states here are called departments like France. The head of each department is called governor as in Texas and is elected for a 5-year term. But then the state is divided into provinces, with a person called a sub-governor who is named by the elected governor for each province. Below this we have a municipal elected official called a mayor. Back to the state or departmental level there is an elected assembly (like our state congress) that influences a lot the work of politics. I am not sure just how much interrelation there is among the parts, or they work. Politics is not my thing at all here.

Now back to the visits yesterday. The sub-governor (with a degree in agriculture) of our area arrived with his technical advisors, all in agriculture, and also came one from our area of the assembly. It just happens that he is the ex-mayor of Cabezas, who while mayor did not help us at all, but now as an assemblista, ready to help us a lot, at least so he said. We will see. They wanted to talk a little, but mostly wanted to see what all we had here, which we ever so gladly showed. It took some two hours as they got out and walked all around to see everything firsthand up close. It turned out well or so it seemed. They don't have a lot of money but have influence on those who do handle the money. We will see just how far this goes. This is not only for the money in the government of Bolivia at various levels, but contacts and influence with international programs that could benefit us a lot. Japan, South Korea, Germany, Belgium, among other places have programs that benefit education such as we have here. (Sorry to say they PAY NO SALARIES.) After seeing all we have, they came back to our little store, and all drank our yogurt and took some along with them in their transportation. We believe we made a real impact on them. We also offered to host any expositions in agriculture that they would like to have (part of their work), showing new ideas and

practices in agriculture, as well as in other places we could send some of our workers to learn more. I was with them most of the time and it tired me out. I had to sit down a lot meanwhile others showed them around and explained what we have and how it all worked. This was in the morning.

In the afternoon, a man came from the big state oil company which also has an obligatory social benefit program. We had made a petition for help from their social benefit program for our gastronomy course. The man who came by just told us that our petition had been accepted and they would get the items for our gastronomy course that we need. But further he said they would help but would demand that the local municipal government also help. This will push the local government some, as they need it so often. We will just wait until the time comes to fulfill their promises. There is more. As I mention the state oil company has to have a social help program. This is the same for all big companies, including food processing companies. With support from the state government, I think we can get food that we need here, like flour, cooking oil, pasta, sugar, and other food items that we use here, some maybe free, but more also at a cheaper price. See how we dream! AND PRAY! To make our dreams come true!

Back to school again. Sadly, to say we are the only high school normally functioning again. There are two ways to operate: 1) virtually at home receiving the classes or homework on a telephone. As we are rural most places out here do not have reliable telephone signals, so this can't work. 2) semi-presential which means that the groups or classes are divided into small groups, with the teacher being televised on a large screen for the other group in the room next door of the same class, and the teacher is able to go to both groups for answering questions or giving more explanations. There are small village schools who are functioning, I think. The high school here in Cabezas is not. The public grade school started this morning with the same style of before, also called semi-presential, with one group of a class on Monday- Wednesday- Friday, with the other group on Tuesday-Thursday. The following week the turns are the opposite. I say this because we have kids from both groups with us, the small kids' dorms up above us. There were no classes yesterday for them, but they started this morning. As you probably can understand our virus cases are down as in other countries where there are vaccinations. So, we are gearing up again in education. It is possible that the school year will be extended. We just don't know for sure. Every week there are different messages from the education offices, some more local, other times national. It does keep us a little confused. We will just wait to see. The sub-governor mentioned that we should have expositions of our school here and we told him we have had these at least two or three times a year, but last year and this year the pandemic has made it impossible. We do enjoy showing off a little (or a lot!) The National Office of Education has announced that textbooks have been printed, over 2 and half million for grade and high school. I am anxiously awaiting some these for our kids, hoping to convince our teachers to give more homework that will deepen our kid's education. There is so much free time now, and this will surely show off in the future when our kids go to a technical institute or a university.

As the cold has been strong recently and before during the vacation we have not had catechism classes, as well as Sunday Mass. But we have continued Saturday Mass with no classes of catechism. Also, in the month we have had Mass in several villages and will continue this. The other Masses are normally Saturday around noon after the

morning Mass in Abapò, unless it is parish feast Mass or celebration, which is on their feast.

It is now Sunday, July 4, a Very Happy and Holy Independence Day for all you there! May Our Lord so bless the country to heal wounds of families, to restore separated ones and heal so many folks so hurt in the past by these separations! And wounds that separates groups from one another.

Back to this past week. Once in the almost 19 years that we are out here in Cabezas, we had zero temperature, meaning 32 degrees for you all. That was back around 2008 or 9, not sure which on August 31. This week we had freezing temperatures all around us, while I registered one degree Celsius, about 34 for you all. It just doesn't happen here normally. Our land in the mountains had colder weather but with the rain there last week, it damaged only a little of our sorghum maize. There the land is at a higher altitude. But the cold has lasted at night for almost a week, with the sun finally coming out to heat the day, while the nights stayed cold. I had a Mass yesterday afternoon in a small village one hour south of here, where it froze rather hard. Lots of leaves from bushes and trees were burned brown by the cold. Of course, that is towards Argentina and the South Pole where our cold weather originates. Just like driving up towards Oklahoma or Kansas, at to the higher altitude to the high plains of Texas. I talk a lot about the cold. It is just that we are not accustomed to this, with our temperatures mostly in the 75 degrees to 95 years around, and our houses, clothes, especially our bed covers, and our bodies are just not adjusted for this. I have noticed in myself, how my body reacts after several days of cold. I can take off some the clothes that I needed the first days. For the kids in my house, I have bought a set of warmer clothes, and bought heavier quilts in a secondhand store here in Cabezas. These were brought from the U. S. The quilts I had cut into halves in our clothes making shop for our single beds. Our main house of course is warmer, as it is built of 12- inch-thick adobe, and we built wooden covers over the windows that can open when it is convenient. With school open, we are again up around 34-5 kids living there and going to classes so that involved quite a bit. We are giving some of the winter clothes for kids in the school also, those who cannot buy them, but our cost of these clothes is also cheaper than outside.

After my years here working with kids abused, orphans, and those from separated families where violence happened for a time before the separation, I am very much aware that these conditions lived out by little kids and teenagers causes emotional difficulties, as anyone of you must know also. Kids are more sensitive, more defensive, even at times more violent in reacting to what they perceive as an attack or belittlement of themselves. This is not in all, and different in each one, but many have unstable reactions because of what they have lived through, not having the love and emotional stability that all human persons need from time in the womb to at least puberty or 18 or so. It is more essential for little kids up to 6 years old. For this reason, I see so much importance for family spirituality, I mean here a God-Presence, time for bible reading, prayer as a family. I know that some folks have strong moral values without an open Faith, but strong moral values can also exist without a direct, conscience, relation with Our God, but it is my sense that God is present even without a direct belief. Jesus Christ died for all, is present in all our world, is moving without perception in so many places, and The Holy Spirit moves anyway in those events and minds that make decisions whether in countries or in families, So I pray for all our

world every day, for Pope Francis, and the Church in every nook and cranny of existence. No one can stop and prevent the love of Our God from penetrating every place, spatially and mentally. And God's Love will enter and hold sway unless this Love is rejected in one way or another. I believe so strongly in God's Loving Mercy! I have seen this in Faith so many times in my working with folks in 3 different countries.

I WANT TO GIVE A HUGE THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU WHO GAVE SO GENEROUSLY TO US IN MAY. MAY OUR LORD CONTINUE TO BLESS ALL OF YOU THERE IN YOUR GREAT GENEROSITY!

Your brother in Jesus Christ,  
Fr. Bob Thames