

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter  
September, 2018

Dear Family, all of you,

Here is the September letter, Hope it finds all of you well.

It is the 29th day of September, a Saturday, with hot wind and even hotter sun. I just finished washing clothes and they will dry really fast. But our crops with our hot sun and wind are being irrigated to keep them growing. September began with a rain that seemed to us a good sign, but that sign was all there was. But this is normal for us here, high winds and sun for September, just now hoping, praying for rain in October.

Some things that have happened this last week might be good to report that give you all an idea of what we do here and how we are seen by the local community and its authorities. All of this in just 3 days one after the other. This besides all the normal things that happen each day without excitement. First last Monday, September 24; I was sleeping soundly at just before 12 midnight when I heard noise outside my door, then a knock asking me to come to the police station. There was a small baby, recently born, that had been strangled by its mother and the police wanted to have a funeral with a blessing for the baby before burying it. They came to me as I am known as more available rather than the priest-pastor assigned now to the parish. The baby was in a black plastic bag in a larger cardboard box. The mother, crying, was brought in also to assist. I won't explain all the situation that brought all of this about. I held the funeral for a baby not baptized, also blessed the mother and prayed for her. Secondly on Tuesday, Sept. 25, I had gone to the city to do some things and received a call from the Child Defense office, asking to see me. When I arrived back at Cabezas the agency's social worker told me of a case of a young girl of 11 who basically had no place to stay. Both her parents had long ago disappeared and she had been living with her grandparents. The grandmother had died and she had lived

only with her grandfather, who had been abusing her for some time, now only recently discovered. The grandfather had been put in prison that day and the girl of 11 was now alone. Would we take her to live with us? Which we accepted in my house although we are a little crowded. What else could we do in the circumstances? She is doing well with us so far, easily adjusting. Then Wednesday, Sept. 26, a woman, Clemetina, who has worked with me since I arrived in Bolivia in September 1996, now a university graduate nurse and specialist in natural medicine, was asked to take a group of the Child Defense office far into the edge of the mountains to see a case of a young girl of 13 who had been forced to begin to live with a man of 27. Clementina knew of the case, I did not, so she was asked to take the personnel of the Defense office to see the family. The father of the girl, plus the young man and the girl were brought back, with the young man put into custody. They also had thought to put the father in custody, but he is the only support for his 6 children, the family without a house of their own and no land to maintain them. The father works only for others and drinks heavily. The young girl went back to her family even though she is not studying. I am saying all of this to give you all an idea of how we are seen by the community. We are involved or have knowledge of so many situations because we go out to the small villages, know so many people and their situations. The authorities know us and trust us, so feel free to call on us at any time when there is a need that we might be able to help in. And all we do is made possible by all of you there who receive this letter and the parishes who help us. We couldn't do anything without your support. So we pray daily for all of you and your generosity. Please keep your help coming, renewing your sponsorship as it comes due. Education and formation for life does not come cheap, our mercy to others mounts up in our own meeting with Our Merciful God at our judgment. Mercy covers a multitude of sins (epistle of St. James 5, 19-20; 1 Peter 4,8; Matthew 5,7; Matthew 18,15ss -The doctrine seems to originate in Proverbs10.12)

But all of it is not necessarily more work for us. Recently, two weeks ago, the mayor and his wife married by the Church, a rare event among us. He married in the Church at Cabezas with the present pastor officiating, but he wanted me to be

present as a friend. I had Masses at the same time in other towns, so could not be there, but I came later to congratulate the couple for being an example for so many other couples who need to take this BIG step here in Bolivia. Their 4 kids, 3 girls and a boy, all dressed up, were there so proud as you might imagine. I have asked young folks here several times if it would affect them if their parents married by the church. They have all said YES as it would give them more security of their parents' marriage and home. But here I wanted to point out how we are seen by the people around us. The people respect us for what we do, giving value to our presence.

Quite a few of you know Luzbaida Warnes who has worked with me since I was in the city. She recently has completed a course in desert making (?) in an institute for chefs in the city (some 10 months). Now she is being asked to give courses in various parts, but also with some kids in my house. Not to brag too much but some of our kids do really well with various kinds of cake. But you all will have to come here to verify what I am saying, to see what you are missing out on. And further on we have begun making ice cream; using my Mom's recipe with some adjustments were made by one of Luzbaida's teachers in Santa Cruz. It has become a big seller in our small snack place in the school, but now someone from the city wants some 30 liters a week (a little more than 8 gallons) which he would like to sell at his parish on Sunday morning. (He is a Confirmation catechist and part of the music ministry). The sisters in Mora too would like to have some to sell on the weekends there. We are thinking to have the ice cream tested in a laboratory for purity before we branch outside of our place to be sure of ourselves. Our ice cream is all natural ingredients with a small package of pudding mix, no artificial flavors nor preservatives. Our cows have all been tested and certified by the Health dept. (we just bought 3 new cows, one producing just over 4 gallons a milking, bought with a donation from St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Arlington through Mr. Ross Martinez—THANK ALL OF YOU THERE) We will present the ice cream in a big exposition of what we produce and make here involving our kids that will take place on October 5, next Friday (to be told about in the October letter.) Our ultimate aim is to prepare our kids who desire to learn to produce for

their own lives in the future in as many ways that we are able. These are our technical courses and their purpose. (agriculture, small business administration, carpentry in wood and metal, mechanic, accounting, secretary, gastronomy, physical therapy, natural medicine, sewing)

We have just finished our third semester (of the four that make up our school year). Those who are failing now will have a very hard time to bring up their grades for passing. There may be one or two in my house who will not make it. This also brings me to another theme, those who live in my house and also some of the kids who come to our school. I think all of you know that we take in a good number of troubled kids, from dysfunctional homes or very difficult circumstances that have caused traumas. I have to refer constantly to the words of Jesus (Matthew 9, 12; Mark 2, 17; Luke 5, 31). Who came to heal the sick, not the healthy. But it is at times very hard as some of the kids come at 13 to 15 or more years with habits and attitudes extremely difficult to change. So I spend much time daily praying. At least I want a chance to try, but at times admitting that a person or two may be beyond our ability. Leaving here I see no chance for them at some other place, only a very hard existence for those for whom we have failed. My friends in Rhode Island speak of a Brothers' order who do very well with troubled youth. Maybe some of them could come here to help, or take over from me. They would certainly be welcomed to visit and meet with us.

Our biggest enemy is the broken or dysfunctional family, but poverty on land becoming desert must come in second. It was about the 15<sup>th</sup> of September when a Dad with two boys in our school came one afternoon with a big sack of beans he has raised. He was giving it for the quota that we ask of families who can give something. He lives in a village south of here where the drought (our dry season from May until October) has been more severe this year, at least in their area. He told of the lack of water for drinking and crops dead in the field, and even some hunger for some families in the village (actually I know of hunger in several places this year). We must know that our school is especially for those types of families,

and Our God keeps making it possible for so many years inspiring the parishes and its families of the Diocese of Fort Worth. Shortly you will see a new diagram of all we do and some of our principles of operation on the Diocesan Web site (at least I think so, as it is now being done, already done in Spanish here in Bolivia). This is THANKS to the score of volunteers who give so much time there in the Diocese who help us to keep going.

Maybe now three or four months or so back, maybe more, I wrote of Noelia, the young girl who is crippled rather severely with a degenerative bone disease. Clementina, mentioned above, wanted to see if natural medicine would help her, so we postponed the operation in July. Now probably she will be operated on in November. This will mean cutting both legs at the knees that later will have prostheses (?) put on both legs. She is actually looking forward to this. She was helped by the natural medicine that allowed her no pain for the first time in many years, but finally the pain returned. Now she is looking forward to walking upright with her new legs, although this may take some 9 to 10 months. She remains happy with big smiles, and today, October 2, she celebrates her sweet 16 birthday in our house with a cake especially made for her. With her sickness she is only in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary school which we have in our high school.

Here it is already the 4<sup>th</sup> of October and I have yet to finish this letter. We are doing so many things now and my head has a hard time concentrating on just one thing—to finish this letter. This year 2018 in Prado (association of Diocesan priests to which I belong, committed to try to live closer to the actual life-style of Jesus) we are trying to deepen ourselves in our charism. I am using the passage of St. John 14, 6, Jesus saying that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If one would make a study of Acts of the Apostles you would find that the word WAY is used 7 times to articulate the name of the early Church before the word “Christian” (Acts 11,26) was used. This wants to express that followers of Jesus are those who walk as Jesus walked, His life-style, His WAY of thinking and

speaking, His WAY of looking at and treating the world and its people, His WAY of acting in all of this. Jesus is the visible reflection of the Father, so His WAY is the Father's WAY of BEING (John 5, 19 & 30; John 14, 8-9). So those who walked as Jesus walked were the Church He founded. (see also 1 John 2,6, but know that St. John in the original Greek wrote "walk as He walked", not the other translations offered in Catholic and Protestant translations of the text offered today. Sorry, as I have said this before). **Truly we never arrive at the complete living as Jesus, but it must always be the goal of any serious follower of Jesus, to BE ALWAYS in the process, only possible with Grace, the Spirit of Jesus, striving towards that goal.** Read Hebrews 12,2-4. A Benedictine priest who lived in Israel for 40 yrs., Bargil Pixner, dying in 2002, archeologist and Scripture scholar, believes that the Epistle of the Hebrews was written for the First Christian Community in Jerusalem, of Jewish extraction, of which Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, was a part. Some of this community knew Jesus in the flesh personally, and the author was encouraging the group to remember and be like Jesus in the flesh, to give testimony that our world yet needs so desperately today.

**Now it is our time to give testimony, to show the MERCY OF THE FATHER in a world which is struggling to free itself from the throes of pride, easy living and the money that makes the easy life possible. Would not the Pagans be jealous if only they could see us? LET JESUS WALK AGAIN IN US, BE CHURCH LIKE THOSE WHO KNEW JESUS IN THE FLESH.**

Your brother in Jesus Christ,

Fr. Bob Thames