

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter September 2019

To All, Greetings! It is already Thursday, the 3rd of October, and I am just starting this letter, hopefully soon to finish and send this out to you.

The big news this month is the Ministry of Education has given us a complete set of equipment and material for our chemistry laboratory for the school. The total cost of the material is just under \$11,000! This was to be at the start of the school year, but now the year is just about over. Nevertheless, we are proud of it. A technical person of the state education office should be coming to install some of the more complicated equipment for our use. It seems to me so important this laboratory. I have been several times to the large cancer hospital in Santa Cruz. It is truly heart-breaking to see so many small kids there with no hair, very thin, both boys and girls, suffering terribly from a disease so young, with all their life ahead of them threatened by something that is impossible for them to understand. It makes me determined all the more to assure that what we produce in food at least here is not going to be a part of this life-threatening process, food with chemicals that eventually will be cause of a sickness that so easily can destroy life that is just beginning. This is to say nothing of mothers and fathers with kids who are also so afflicted, that makes them incapable, or only with great difficulty, being able to continue their vocation as loving parents to bring to adult life the children they have engendered. I know that cancer has many causes, but certainly life-threatening chemicals that are part of our daily existences are part of this. (Bolivia still allows many pesticides and herbicides that are not allowed in the U. S.) Our own production of food has been and will continue to be without these chemicals, all organic production. Even our ice cream, yogurt and cheese are made with all-natural ingredients. And the taste is delicious, believe me. No preservatives, no taste enhancers, ALL NATURAL, like in the old days. The chemical lab will be key to much of this, we are so proud as you can understand. At present we have one of our former students in the university in Santa Cruz who is studying industrial food preparation, plus three graduates with experience in the

professional field, who are friends of ours and have offered to help us here in Cabezas in our classes. Plus, we have Luzbaida Warnes who continually takes courses in food preparation to better our processes. She is now being sought after to give courses in gastronomy in several other towns as she becomes more known. Now even the Municipal government is asking her to give a series of classes on cooking in Abapó, the largest town around here.

My emotions are rather high on this as my Dad died of cancer for using DDT (remember this fly killer?). We always mixed the powder and water with our hands (starting from around 1947), can you believe this? Not knowing nor receiving any warning about it! Five years after his death the government in the U. S. (early 70's) prohibited its use precisely for its cancer-causing elements in the lymph nodes, that which killed my Dad. And the flies keep on living, multiplying!

But I want to go further on this topic. In August of this year there was an announcement on the news that some one billion people on this earth go hungry each day today. And by 2040 there is predicted a food crisis in many countries that will cause much social unrest, riots, etc., if not more, for the lack of food. Bolivia is a country that is capable of producing much more than it consumes. And we at Our Lady of Carmen want to be a part of this production for our world. It is part of our Faith in Jesus Christ. "Feed the hungry" is the first part of Jesus' words on the Last Judgment (Matthew 25, 31-46). Distribution of this food to those in need will be another problem to overcome. But we can do our part at the beginning. But what if we go further, producing students who can go out to other places with the know-how to produce, keep food pure and natural, and teach others how to do it. We teach this at our high school, at our adult high school, and in our technical institute. For me hydroponics is one of the answers and we know how to do it. Interestingly, the technique was developed in Israel, where Jesus lived. So right on! This is the FOLLOWING OF JESUS AS JESUS WOULD WANT! OUR TESTIMONY THAT TEACHES LOVE IN THE CONCRETE! "IN THE FLESH" AS POPE FRANCIS SAYS. Pope Francis uses the word "encarnacion" the same word for Jesus being born as a complete human being as well as being God (apostolic

exhortation “Rejoice and Be Glad” (*Gaudate et Exsultate*) of 2018, paragraph 37). Hungry people can’t maintain their bodies with just words proclaimed. The following is my translation from the Spanish copy that I have: “To conceive a mind without a body, incapable of touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others, completely enclosed in an encyclopedia of abstractions.” Pope Francis insists that our Faith must be practical, lived out, in our daily lives, not just doctrine memorized from the catechism.

I have just received word from the professors at school who have had their ears pegged to the radio that our young senior student, Waltico Airuare, (his first name, remember from last year?) just won the Bolivian national championship in the 100 meters dash AGAIN. From last year he already has received a 5-year scholarship to the university for teachers if he wishes to major in physical education. I think it is very possible he might receive more yet with this win. He comes from a very humble and united family in a small Guarani village just south of here about 30 miles from Cabezas. I can only Praise Our God Who does such things for the humble! He is a senior this year, so he won’t be back next year. Our prayers and best wishes are with him. This year the national championships were held in Cochabamba, in the center of the country. At 8000 ft. altitude I had thought this might have affected him. Obviously not! Of course, La Paz, the capital, at 12,500 ft. might have been more difficult, but that is for another year. I wait until he comes to know his time in the race. Last year it was just above 11 seconds, very good for a junior at 16 yrs. old. At 20 to 24 he could be down to 10 seconds. He yet has some growing to do, and with more professional help from experts in this, he just might do this someday. And he studied at Our Lady of Carmen High School in Cabezas! The district superintendent of schools here just spoke to me about the reception that we will have tomorrow in the whole town of Cabezas to honor him. I am hoping that his Mom will come as she did last year so she can be proud of her son. Surely, he is what he is by so much support from his family. We rode around the whole center of town with him on top of our big truck, showing off his metal and waving to the people. Then we ended all with a congregation of folks and authorities in the plaza in Cabezas Pueblo. (Friday AM & afternoon 5 Oct. I have to correct myself now-

I was just told that Waltico was second in the 100-meter dash and first in the 200-meter dash. Also, the district superintendent in our reception ceremony at noon today said that Waltico has a scholarship in any public university of his choice and the career of his choice also. This is broader than last year that said he would need to major in physical education.)

Another topic that excites me at present is the work on our retreat center. We are closing it in so that students can spend the night there without fear and without being able to escape out in darkness. Actually, it is basically finished now, with a small room that we hope to enlarge to 3 small rooms with a bath that can house an elderly couple to watch over the center all the time by living there. My concern here is the need ever more urgent to give our kids and students of all the other schools around a deeper formation in marriage preparation and spiritual and social living for a family. There is so much family separation and dysfunctional families, with so many emotionally disturbed kids. My own house is full of them. Of course, our area is no different from all the rest of the world. The millions of migrants have now much worse problems in family disintegration, but that is not our situation here at present. We must work with our own situation. With our personnel now we are capable of doing quite a bit in this regard with our kids, but we could use a person with more experience in this type of work. Maybe with prayer Our Lord will send someone our way, as happened in the past when a need arose. We are truly a work of Our God.

My rural roots are failing. I have not said anything about the weather which is usually my starting remarks. As in so many parts of the world this year, we have had very hot and dry weather, but lucky for us we have a good amount of silage to use as cow feed. And with our irrigation system in our garden we are raising even more vegetables than other years. This at least is good. And our two water wells are holding up this year. Two years ago, when we had a bad hot spell, both wells failed, and our kids walked all over the place looking for water to drink and to bathe with. To help for the future the state government has given us a 10,000 liter water tank (about 2700 gallons). We want to put it on top of a 9-meter

tower of our well on the land near the school, then connect all the wells together with a pipe system that can be turned on and off with each well as needed in emergencies.

My reflection this month starts with the readings of the last Sunday of September, the rich man and Lazarus along with the reading from Amos, the Old Testament prophet from about 750 to 800 years before Jesus. There are two points that seem important for me. The first is to note that the rich man (without name it seems on purpose by Jesus) is not noted for his corruption, his lying, bad treatment of his wife and family, nor his neighbors, only that he could not see his “suffering brother” at his door, nor feeling any responsibility for him, Lazarus by name, a real person identified by Jesus. Today with our news capability we cannot but know, see, feel, the pain of others in our world. And not to sense responsibility for those who suffer, could be the cause of our passing our eternity “in torment”. We are a close family, made so by Our God (read and meditate Matthew 25, 31-46 and so many other passages from Jesus, see all of Matthew 25 and Luke 19,11 ss). We are family and so must feel, sense being, family and so act as one big family in our world. Each person and each family must see how they are called to live out this familyhood, worldwide and next door.

The second point I see, uniting the Gospel reading with the first reading from the Prophet Amos, is our tendency as a world to be oriented more and more to an egotistical hedonism. We consider “ours exclusively” that which falls into our hands, especially by spending “our money” so as to be “our property”. In no way am I talking political socialism or any other political system. I am asking us to consider from a personal Faith in Our God Who is real Owner of all the earth (see Psalm 24 and so many other passages of the Bible, the passages of the final judgment where we have to answer to Our Lord for how we have lived our lives and how we treated the things God put into our hands.) We must render an account. As our Faith tells it, it is “God’s earth and all that is it”, first and foremost, not ours for our use exclusively. It is to be used, shared for those who need it as well as our taking care of our needs. We must be so careful in thinking what is ours from the viewpoint of a human legal system is not so necessarily “ours” when our need has been taken

care of sufficiently (not an over-using) and there yet is some left over. Taking our Faith in Our God into consideration, to whom does what is left over belong? Our human legal system must always be second place with our Faith in Jesus Christ as first. That is the Faith that the Gospel of the first Sunday of October talks about. How much today can so many identify with Amos's telling the people of his time and place, the reason for their projected end? It was for just an overdose of luxury that the prophet is predicting their end. And this happened within some 25 to 50 years of its proclamation. Our Faith has so much to offer, so necessary for us today, if we hope to continue in a world whose over-use especially of clean air and clean water is foretelling our end.

Please think of us here in need, as well as so many other peoples who suffer, when seeing the need to share what has come into our hands.

My prayer is for all of you daily and let this be reciprocal. We are so in need of the prayer you present to Our Forgiving and Merciful Lord each day!

Your brother in Jesus Christ, Fr. Bob Thames