

Father Bob Thames
December 2023 Letter
Cabezas, Bolivia

Father Bob Thames' end of December 2023 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.

Friday Dec. 29; I greet all of you in this Christmas time, asking the Blessing of Jesus Christ to be born in the hearts of each of you and this same Jesus Christ stay with all of you this year as it rolls on until the end of 2024.

The big event this month has to be Christmas, for us and for the world at large, even if the material world does not recognize it. Only with the Humble Servant Jesus Christ, born among animals in Bethlehem, Whose Love penetrates all, changes all, will there be peace with universal equality within reason, including all women with men, all adults with children, all races, religions, and languages. Only with Love that comes from Our God will such a Divine Reality of Universal Equality and Union become Existential. Maybe only in Heaven when this world ends, for it seems so distant from us today, so unimaginable at the present time.

To go back a little to the end of our school year, classes ended December 7, our graduation being on December 15 for our high school with some 36 young folks moving on to another stage of their lives, hopefully blessed by their time here not only with knowledge but a sense of purpose with the use of their talent and knowledge that the world so needs. This is not only for those who can pay for it, but also to help those who need their knowledge with some love without pay. Jesus loving us comes without pay and education must include this sense of what life is all about. We were created to love, and we have to figure out how we will love sharing our knowledge. Of course, we do this at home with our own families, but our Love in Jesus Christ moves us beyond the walls of our house. The world today needs this type of love to combat so much materialistic selfishness. And without any doubt in my mind so many of us have this Love that can be given to those who need it that are around us. We just have to ask ourselves, examine our surroundings, to see who these folks are. This type of reflection will make Christmas last longer,

maybe last all year long, with Jesus being born in others through our love.

We have had two small rains so far in this rainy season, enough to plow some and plant some. It is not like last year when heavy rains came in December. We continue to pray, hoping.

Now back to Christmas. I had Masses and celebrations over a rather wide area, and it became rather exhausting for this old codger. But this offering to the people is why I came here, and why I stay. Saturday Dec. 23 and Sunday Dec. 24 really tired me and at the same time are the purpose of my life. As I repeat, it is why I am here, why I must stay, doing what I can. Along with this I have the kids in my house and the kids in the small kids' dorm up beside the public grade school. In my house there are very few at present, only some 5, (3 girls and 2 boys,) all working with the hogs (boys) and cooking (girls) for all of us, workers and ourselves. There are some 8 little kids at the small kids' dorm. And we are waiting for another young girl of 13 with a baby who will arrive any day when the Defense office goes to pick her up. She was with us before, was put into a home that specializes with young girls with babies. But it was discovered that the little baby has some mental incapacity or damage, and the home is not prepared for this situation, so they will return the young girl to us. I must mention too that a young girl of 15 gave birth earlier this month and my home is hers as she has no other. (her father was brutal, killed her mother, now in prison). The birth was by an operation as the umbilical cord was wrapped around the neck of her baby. Both of these along with others are "mine" in the sense that there are no parents other than myself for them, too long to explain about each one. In this sense Jesus is being born all year long in my house as the new kids arrive or some just giving birth.

Because we had so few kids we did not have enough to have the Nativity play acted out as we have had all the previous years. There was the passing of presents done by secret name drawing. (confusing?) And we had lots of food both on Sunday, 24 Dec, and Monday, 25 Dec. I admit I ate too much but could have eaten more fruit salad. There was cake and ice cream, and yogurt, all done by us, very good! The workers who have to take care of milking and the hogs were all present with the rest of us. We ate in the school on the basketball court below the big, metal roof. It

was cooler there and the little kids had lots of room to run around. We will do the same in Jan. First, New Year's Day.

Now New Year's Day, Jan. 1: I have been lazy these days, with some Masses scattered out, but not many as at Christmas. People here look for Mass on Christmas (about 250 or so in main church), but on New Year's Eve, only about 40 to 50. New Year's is more a festive time for using fireworks and drinking, some dancing too. Faith practice is not much a part of that. Again, the practice has lessened the last 5 or 6 years as opposed to some 10 or more years back when folks yet were much more faithful in their practice. We had all our folks from Cabezas go with us in a pickup truck, some 20 or so (babies & older folks in the double cabin, all the other kids sitting down in the back of the pickup, really packed in). After Mass we returned to the small kids' dorm for really good chocolate cake made by one of the girls, with soda. Then I go to bed about 10:30 pm. No Mass on New Year's Day so just made it lazy, or so I had hoped. I yet woke up about 5:30 am and couldn't get back to sleep. So, I prayed the Office prayers as I always do, but couldn't sleep any more. Surely, I will get sleepy after eating at noon, but I resist sleeping then, just walk around hazy until night time.

I had mentioned some about pasture grass in the previous letter. A veterinarian who has been here for quite a few years told me that the tropical grass with a large and impossible name (Mike Wuller knew of it) was the best suited for our area. So, we bought some 5 kilos (maybe 12 lbs) this last week and planted it last Friday or Saturday by hand in a 7 acre patch near the dairy barn. We will see how it works. Our best rain of this last week helped a lot on really wetting the ground. And the weather forecast is that we will have 3 to 4 days of rain this week we are starting. A new man has started two weeks ago with our cows, and we bought better cow feed, and the cows have started producing some 20 liters more each milking. We had thought this would happen, but the previous man was determined not to change. The previous man left a week before Christmas. My hope is to start a butcher shop up at the small kids' dorm, to sell meat. We can earn about twice the money selling the meat rather than the cow alive. Then with money gained we hope to buy some really productive cows of high quality, about one half as many as we have now, but much more milk produced. This is earning more from our milk, lower our costs, and teaching all of this to students at the same

time. More common here is to have native cows that produce a gallon or two but are very resistant to the tropical diseases. But today there are vaccines that protect the cows, so not so necessary to have lower producing cows. (An old dairyman talking from the farm some 9 to 10 miles east of Decatur on the Old Stoney Road.)

(Now 2 Jan.) The Christmas time Masses with its Scriptural readings have always penetrated into me, but this year, maybe more than other years some phrases on Mary, the mother of Jesus, have touched me more than usual. Maybe it is because of the world situation at present, the wars, the hunger, other tensions on the international. Here I am talking of the possible conflict with Guyana and Venezuela, making South America again in the news. I will put these phrases here to give emphasis. All are of St. Luke, chapter 2, first vs. 19, then verse 33, then verse 51. What we find is the depth of Mary, surely not much more than a young girl at the time, covered so much by the Holy Spirit. The Proto-Gospel of Saint James the Apostle (about 150 AD) gives her age at the time at 17 years old, very possible in the Jewish society of Jesus' time, but this book is not the most reliable for data, much imagination it seems, just that there is no other that I know of. But Grace makes all the difference in human life, and the Angel Gabriel said, "Hail, Full of Grace! The Lord is with you!" Here is what I am talking about, the 3 phrases: all of chapter 2 of St. Luke: vs. 19: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." Then vs. 33: "The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him". Then vs. 51: "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart." Never before in my years of reading scripture have these phrases hit me like this year, the importance of keeping words, events that happen, what people have said (it doesn't make any difference if we agreed, was for us, or against us, it could be used at times by Our God as a message). Our lives are to be meditated so as to take out what God might be using to mold us, teach us, change us, question us. The Spirit is always present, working for our Salvation. It is evident that Mary was aware of this Presence, so open to the Spirit, a real model for us, and a Person so concerned about each of us, ready to help at any moment. See the history of Mary in the Church, especially now Our Lady of Guadalupe. I encourage you all to think about this, maybe make a change or so in your lifestyle, to see how Our God wants to deepen and make you more an example for those around you. The world needs you as a saint!

To end this letter I just want to remind you that you all are prayed for each day, in general, some folks by name, especially my family members (here on earth and beyond), and others whom I know well. May Our Lord so encourage you to continue to help us, as I have said before, helping each month with some \$25, \$35, \$50 or more, to keep us helping the poorest in eastern Bolivia to have a better, more productive life, and also to serve others around them. Hopefully, new persons donating, or older ones starting again, giving themselves for others. All of this we teach here to our students, trying to form apostles to service in our world today. This as we progress slowly to be more self-supportive, maybe never completely self-sustained, but closer.

Your brother in Jesus Christ, Fr. Bob Thames

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>

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