



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive
Ojai, California 93023

January, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Usually we only think of grieving as a response to the death of someone we love. But places, things, phases of our life are also precious to us and we go through all the familiar stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression before acceptance when these are taken from us too.

To a greater or less degree the downtown chapel is beloved by most parishioners. To the extent that it is treasured, people will mourn the fact that it is no longer ours.

The Scriptures never tell us not to grieve but they do admonish us to grieve as people of hope. Out of death comes life, out of loss comes gain. To expect growth without cost would be unreasonable. We are moving out of the chapel only because the chapel has served so well. The Masses, marriages, sacraments celebrated there have led to an expanded community needing expanded facilities.

The plant normally reflects the Church it serves. As we let go of downtown sites and build here, replace old familiar spaces with new enlarged ones, let us work and pray that we as a community will be joined together more closely and serve the Lord ever more widely and creatively.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "K. Pat".



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February, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Catholics are a restless lot, always on the move. Who else takes to processions the way we do? One reason the Stations are so dear to us is surely because it is a devotional walk. Europe in the Ages of Faith must have been always in flux with old and young off to the Crusades or traipsing to one holy shrine after another. Even when in one place we are not still and visitors at Mass find the kneeling, sitting, standing changes bewildering.

The dozen or so young people from the parish, then, who are joining hundreds of thousands of others from all over the world converging on Denver this August to see the pope are responding to a venerable urge deep within our traditions.

Why we should be so actively a Pilgrim People, I don't know. Two possibilities come to mind. In travel we savor our Catholicity. Always in crowded St. Peter's Square, Rome, hearing dozens of languages, seeing costumes from every corner of the earth, we have a sense of who we are, the universal Church. In Denver together with students of every continent, color and culture, young people will experience themselves as the Church that spans the globe.

We are more at home than most with symbols. Times and places, people and things can all point us toward the holy. We have the Church year, blessed objects, sacred places and consecrated people. The pope is not just a symbol but he is a powerful one nonetheless. In his presence, seeing him, hearing him, maybe touching him, youth will sense the unity the papacy provides not just for diverse peoples of the present but through all the diverse ages back to Peter.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "K. Oat".



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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March 1993

Dear Member of St. Thomas Parish,

Last month I wrote about the young people who will be going on pilgrimage to Denver in August to see the pope and said travelling was in our blood as Catholics. This month we look at another type of journey all of us are invited to take leading to Easter.

Lent is a spiritual journey. In it we travel with Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem and his death and resurrection.

The means of transportation on this trip haven't changed over the centuries. While pilgrims used to travel on foot and now use jets, we still move through Lent by prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Prayer keeps in mind our destination and shows us the way. Daily Mass, Morning Prayer, the Rosary, Station of the Cross, the Monday Evening Series along with private reflection and scripture reading move us with the Church from the ordinary place we have grown comfortable in toward the unfamiliar heights to which we have been called.

Every journey means pitching away what holds us back. Fasting does just that. Watching what we eat, avoiding excess leads to a body trim and healthy. Cutting back on TV, work, busyness can effect the same wonders for the spirit.

We aren't travelling alone. Less time, energy and resources spent on self means more available for God and neighbor. The Rice Bowls collecting pennies not spent on our luxuries will provide necessities for others. In the same way time not spent on ourself is available for prayer and service.

But every trip needs planning. Clear calendars, make decisions now that assure you are not spiritually at Easter where you were Ash Wednesday.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "K. Galt".



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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185 St. Thomas Drive
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April, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

It's April again and what is everybody talking about?
The unraffle, of course,

The unraffle is a clever refinement of the regular raffle that has eliminated the embarrassment of selling chances, the trouble of filing out tickets, the anxiety of waiting for a drawing, the disappointment of losing. You simply put \$20 in the handy enclosed envelope and send it in.

"Why should I do that?", you may ask. The answer is as simple as the process. Because we need the money. Anybody who has been watching the mini financial report week by week in the bulletin must realize that we are counting on proceeds from the Parish Festival to balance the budget and pay the bills. The unraffle provides the seed money to make the purchases and take care of the expenses that come up in the weeks preparing for the big event May 29-30.

The Festival is more than just a fund raiser, though. It is a Spring celebration of our life together as a parish, happy for God's presence, thankful for his gifts. Especially this year when we have been without a hall, this opportunity to come together is important.

Many parishioners are already working hard getting ready for the weekend. Please circle the dates and plan on spending some time and treasure. To make sure the Festival and the parish are winners, please contribute now \$20, or what you can, to the unraffle.

In Christ,

John and I want to thank you for your cooperation and assistance. This has to be the essence of sacrificial giving, even with no prizes we do have one big winner- OUR PARISH. We look forward to another great Festival.



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May, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

It has always been the Catholic tradition that the beloved disciple to whom Jesus entrusted his mother from the cross was not just the individual John but all of us. From that hour, as the gospel recounts, Mary became our mother and the Church has cared for her as such.

All mothers mother every child differently and each child according to its age and circumstances. In the same way Marian devotion varies from culture to culture and changes from generation to generation. But Mary's place in the plan of salvation is constant. Vatican Council II simply echoed previous councils when it said of her: "In an utterly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to our souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace."

May, when the world is abloom with new life, is a fitting time to remember the woman who gave birth to Christ the life of the world and who continues to nourish and protect his body the Church.

In Christ,

K. Pat



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June, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

A few weeks ago, in connection with the workshop for first confession, I gave my annual tour of the church. The youngsters, and as many parents as want to come along, are taken through the sanctuary, the sacristy and the "back stage" work and preparation areas behind the altar. The little kids with the curiosity of their age want to see everything, handle everything, know all about everything. They stand in the pulpit, examine the altar stone, peer into the sacrarium, check out vessels, vestments and books.

It is a learning experience but leaves me with misgivings. Does getting too close mean familiarity and loss of a sense of mystery? About the sacred it seems there must always be some sense of otherness. Sacred places, sacred objects, sacred time should be somehow different from the ordinary.

Everything about church used to be so obviously special: the language was foreign, ministers wore vestments and others their Sunday Best, behavior was constrained. Worship and the times have changed. Layers of mysteriousness have been stripped away that sometimes hid the mystery itself. "Welcoming" and "friendly" have become as important in church conduct as "proper."

With a less rigid style of celebrating and a more congenial way of acting, though, something can get lost. Awe is still an appropriate response to the presence of God and reverence a proper attitude toward religious rites and objects. Church is a sacred place like no place else.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Pat".



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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July, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

"Is it a mortal sin?" For generations of Catholics that was all one had to know. Whether the topic was missing Mass on Sundays, contraception or withholding on one's income tax, it was the bottom line that counted. And Father always knew the bottom line.

It was never, of course, quite as simple as it seemed. Mortal sin involves internal conditions of knowledge and consent that are by their nature unobservable. In a concrete, specific situation only God and the individual know whether a mortal sin has been committed. "It's a mortal sin!" is precisely the judgement we are warned not to make. That judgement is even rasher in a society where there is widespread ethical confusion and lack of moral formation. In such a world good people sometimes do objectively bad things. To commit a mortal sin requires some wisdom and will, commodities not too common in our day and age.

Then too, complex problems don't always have simple answers. The Vatican isn't waffling when it goes on paragraph after paragraph to explain its position on homosexuality, the bishops aren't beating around the bush with their lengthy statements on racism, war or economic justice. Life gets more complicated all the time and it should be no surprise that the rules are sometimes involved.

That doesn't mean there are no fixed standards or objective truths. It does mean that "mortal sin" is not always a good question and never a good call.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Pat".



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September, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Missed again. I got back from 10 days on the Oregon Coast only to be greeted by the Newsweek cover story that nobody is going to the beach this year. Lying about is out and bungee jumping, ice climbing and sky surfing is in. If I had known in time, of course, I would have planned my vacation around the dangerous diversions in vogue this year. As it was I wasted hours watching sunsets, walking along deserted beaches, listening to the ocean crashing against the rocky coast.

Doing nothing, though, I did get to understand better what God must have had in mind insisting on a day of rest. Surrounded by noise and people, always busy, we become scattered and distracted. Whether it is a Sunday at home or a vacation away, we all need some leisure for quiet and reflection. The world is, as St. Paul reminds us, a great sacrament pointing to the God who created it. If we never stop to smell the roses along the way, we probably will never wonder how they came to be so beautiful.

All was not, of course, prayer and contemplation. I drove thousands of miles of highways, talked to dozens of natives along the way and studied diligently the northwest lifestyle. In case you may be heading that way, I pass along some observations.

The worldwide backlash against immigrants is real. This time our governor is on to something. Our less populous neighbors to the north and east look with horror at the huddled masses of Southern California and shudder at the image of their borders overrun by hordes on the move.

"Slower vehicle" is a term of derision no self-respecting driver takes to heart. Everyone sees him or her self living in the fast lane and only fittingly driving there. Heeding "keep to the right" advice would indicate a poor self image.

Most trucks, busses and campers, and even some family vans, are equipped with supercharge equipment which kicks into operation immediately on entering a passing zone. What seemed for miles to be a disabled vehicle looking for a turnout is suddenly unsurpassable.

Earth watchers not to panic. There are still many trees.

In Christ,



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October, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

In November we will be voting on the Voucher Initiative, a measure that would make money available to children in the State for education in a school of the family's choice. The amount would be half the cost of education at the public school.

As with most issues we vote on, there are advantages and disadvantages to the measure and people of good will and good sense will be voting pro and con.

The measure, however, surfaces some myths about state run schools that I think are dangerous. About 150 years ago government got into the education venture. Not so many generations later there is a presumption abroad that support or recognition of non-government schooling is a threat to the American way of life. That kind of flag-wrapping is always dangerous. The government has been building low income housing and is getting into health care. Will our great grandchildren think it elitist to go to a private hospital and somewhat undemocratic to live in a private house?

State run schools are neither a hallmark nor a guarantee of democracy. Every modern dictatorship has had public schooling. Generally that is the only kind tolerated. A democracy depends on informed, thinking citizens. It needs good schools, however they be funded and administered. Independent schools, free from state control, would seem to be an invaluable help to preserving freedom.

Public schools are an indispensable feature of modern society and all segments of society deserve adequately funded ones. The education of children, however, is fundamentally the right and responsibility of parents, not the state. The decision on how and where a child is to be educated belongs to parents not the state nor the teachers union. Vouchers may or may not be the way to go, Initiative 174 may or may not be a good piece of legislation but the issue must be not what is best for the public school system but what is best for children, families and society at large.

In Christ,



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November 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

It is that time of year again when as a community and as individuals we lovingly and prayerfully decide how best to respond to God's unconditional love.

Ordinarily we make decisions how to spend time, talents and money as if they were our own. It is so easy to forget none of these are absolutely ours but all are gifts, temporarily at our disposal but all eventually to be accounted for.

Stewardship is a faith decision. These days many people are having a hard time making ends meet on the income they have. After expenses have all been met, not much is left for donations. Stewardship reverses the process. The gift, the return to God, has been prayerfully decided beforehand and is given first. The rest is managed in a way that bills can still be paid. Aware of holding all in trust, we make an act of trust that God will not be outdone in generosity.

If Stewardship makes a difference in the life of the parishioner, it makes an equally drastic difference in the life of the parish. There are 720 registered families in the parish. According to the 1990 census, the median family income in the Ojai valley is \$43,088. Assuming against all evidence that we are a normal cross section, if even only registered families gave 1% of their income to the church, the sum would be \$310,234. Our actual collections last year were \$220,532. As stewardship takes on, we move from desperately raising money for one expense after another to providing services as needed without cost.

Enclosed is a commitment card. Please meet as a family and, reflecting on God's goodness to you, decide together what would be a fitting return to make. No need to sign the card, it is a covenant between yourself and God. The cards will, however, strengthen your intention and help the parish to foresee and plan its resources. Cards will be returned at the Masses the weekend of November 6,7.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. B. T.", written in dark ink.



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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185 St. Thomas Drive
Ojai, California 93023

December, 1993

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

The inn that night was crowded with wealthy travellers able to afford comfortable and secure lodgings. The tired, pregnant girl and her poorly dressed husband were shown to a ramshackle shed out back. In a place fit for animals Mary gave birth to her child and named him Jesus. Only the ox and the donkey bade him welcome.

From the beginning the Son of God identified himself with the unwanted. Throughout his life he was a threat to the privileged. He died among criminals, despised and rejected.

Sentimentality should never turn Christmas into a time for toys and tinsel, a holiday for children. The bambino we place in the crib at Midnight Mass, the pierced feet we kiss on the cross Good Friday are the same body we worship glorified at Easter. Christmas begins the birth-ministry-death-resurrection cycle which is the Church year celebration of Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Devotion to the helpless infant also cannot be separated from compassion for the powerless around us. Jesus was homeless in Bethlehem, an immigrant in Egypt, without income most of his life. Our society is becoming increasingly hostile to people like that.

In Christ,

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