



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
Ojai, California 93023

January, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

I happened to be watching TV some time ago when the Queen of England noted with classic British understatement that 1992 was not for her the best of years. A series of scandals had rocked the royal house and threatened the very survival of the monarchy. American candor would force me to acknowledge that for a priest 1993 was not a very good year. Our faith assures us the institution itself will continue but a sequence of revelations each more damaging than the last has left the American priesthood severely wounded in reputation and credibility.

Although those responsible are statistically few compared to the number of ordained who exercise their ministry faithfully and conscientiously, the trust level for all has suffered. An editorial in the Los Angeles Times noted perceptively that the victims of the transgressions are not only those immediately involved but all Catholics and priests whose relationship of trust and confidence has been damaged.

A time of shame and confusion, though, is also a time of grace. When we are broken and humbled, we are most open to the action of the Spirit. As St. Paul puts it, when we are weak, then we are strong. Pray that 1994 begins a time of cleansing and renewal.

In Christ,

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



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February, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Probably no image has captured the spirit of Los Angeles like the freeway. Wide bands of concrete sweeping along mile after mile unhampered symbolize and make possible an independence and mobility not realized or realizable elsewhere. The Angeleno can live autonomous in privacy making contact with others by choice, where and when he pleases. Community, no longer determined by neighborhood nor geography, is left to choice.

Because the freeway has become the symbol as well as the mainstay of a life style, TV and newspaper pictures of broken roadways, collapsed overpasses and ruined ramps are particularly disturbing. The earthquake has not only damaged the actual city but touched and called into question the dream city as well.

We have known all along that our metropolis sits on deep geological faults. Maybe we have been building a society on some false presumptions and flawed aspirations as well. In the months to come utilities will be restored, buildings reconstructed and roads reopened. But the city will rise again over the same break lines. The restoration effort, however, could ground us more firmly in faith and unite us more closely in compassion and shared concerns. Let us work and pray that it be so.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Pat." The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "J. Pat.".



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March, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

As usual the Religious Education Congress this year featured some stirring addresses, some excellent workshops and some moving liturgies. Participants went away nourished by the presentations but also fired-up by the enthusiasm and devotion of so many thousands of fellow catechists.

Not altogether new but slightly more prominent this year was a concern on the part of some about orthodoxy and loyalty.

It seems simple minded to expect that anyone who publicly opposes important church teaching should be asked to speak at a diocesan forum. A person who disagrees with national policy probably will not be sponsored on a lecture tour by the State Department. I don't see that violates any constitutional rights or calls into question the place of dissent in a free society.

A group of religious teachers especially should treasure the truth and recognize the responsibility of passing it on intact; nothing lost, no falsehood added.

I would also hope that they love the institution they are a part of and serve. Angry, frustrated people don't make good evangelists, catechists or theologians.

It seems to me Congress reflects all of the above. Mistakes in scheduling, slips in presentations if they do occur and are brought to light are corrected - as happened this year.

The one responsible for Congress and the integrity of religious education in the diocese is the bishop. That is an awesome responsibility for which he is arduously prepared, carefully chosen and finally ordained. Nothing says he couldn't use help once in a while and shouldn't be coached. But to set oneself up as watch dog of the shepherd goes beyond awesome.

In Christ,



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April, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

1969 was the year man first walked on the moon. It was the year of the Woodstock Festival and the Mylai Massacre. In the midst of such events, the establishment in California of a small province of Augustinians was hardly noticed.

This year, 1994, the Augustinian Order is observing the 750th anniversary of its canonical foundation. Along side that, 25 years as a province may seem hardly worth noting.

If the world and even fellow Augustinians were not overly impressed, the California Augustinians nevertheless celebrated their Silver Jubilee last week with a certain sense of satisfaction and gratitude. Contritely aware we have not been perfectly "one mind and heart intent upon God" as the Rule directs, there is still a brotherhood only faith in a common Father can create. Remembering men like Vince McGarvey, Davey Ryan, Tom Walsh, RK Smith and others who have died reminded us what good company it has been. In those 25 years, while growing older and fewer, continuing to serve in our schools and in the missions, we have expanded ministry in parishes, built a Retreat Center, taken on responsibility for an orphanage, provided a house for children with Aids, set up housing projects for poor families and for the elderly.

Religious Life is going through one of those transitional periods it has experienced before in the long history of the church. For all the changes and signs of crisis, it remains a particularly clear sign in the Church of the presence of the risen life of Jesus we celebrate at Easter.

In Christ,



1919

St. Thomas Aquinas **75** Diamond Jubilee



1994



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May, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

If the pope says yes and the cardinal says yes, who's to say no? Whatever our private opinion, girl altar servers are here. There are all sorts of issues and agendas at work behind that outcome but the framework and process of the decision is itself interesting.

The Church is sometimes seen as authoritarian and oppressive. In principle at least, it is a very free society. The basic assumption of Church law is that any baptized man, woman or child can be or do anything unless it can be proved otherwise. Moreover, rights and privileges are to be stretched and interpreted broadly; restrictions are to be applied narrowly.

The set of laws that governs all aspects of Catholic church life is called Canon Law. In 1917 the enormous task of assembling and categorizing all provisions that apply to the universal Church was completed and we had for the first time in a single volume a Universal Code of Canon Law. Altar ministry was restricted to men and boys.

Following Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI called for a revision of the code to reflect the dramatic changes that had occurred. When the revised code appeared in 1983, it was without the ban against girl servers. Because the ban wasn't there, had it gone away? Yes, declared an authoritative decision of the Congregation for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts in 1992.

But who trusts lawyers? If girl servers are not forbidden, are they permitted? Yes, declared the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 1994.

Sometimes it is hard to get permission. Sometimes it seems hard to give it.

In Christ,

*Mr. Pot*



1919

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June, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

This June I will celebrate my 50th anniversary as a High School Graduate.

Looking back over half a century at my early education what strikes me first is the difference between what one saw and what one got. For the first 12 years of my schooling the learning center was a minimally equipped, usually overcrowded, most often double-graded classroom. What served for a campus was a patch of dirt. Ordination qualified the Augustinian faculty in high school; I don't know what degrees or certificates the nuns in grade school had. No requirements I knew of screened the student body.

And yet in such unlikely circumstances, remarkable things happened. We learned the basic skills of reading, writing and calculating, usually quite well. But more important, what someone has called "the whole Catholic thing" was reverently and faithfully passed on. That included, of course, doctrine and information but also traditions and attitudes, a world view and a way of life.

At the time I took all this pretty much as a matter of course. The sacrifices of my parents, the dedication of my teachers, the interest and support that made the venture work were largely unnoticed and unappreciated. It is only with the passing of the years that I have come to understand the value and the rarity of the gift I received.

My early education was by priests and nuns in a Catholic School. Time and changes have for the most part removed that option today. Passing on "the whole Catholic thing", though, is as much a vital and exalted goal now as it has ever been. The CCD hour or any single program cannot do it. It must now be the work of the whole parish through its liturgies, its programs, its various ministries, with parents involved and parishioners supporting.

In Christ,

*A Pat*



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July, 1944

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Back in 1968, shortly after he had won the Heisman Trophy at USC, O. J. Simpson and I were out having dinner together. Well, actually, it was a banquet where he was getting an award and I was on hand to give the invocation. We did sit next to each other at the head table, though, and spent an hour or so in small talk. I still remember how impressed I was not just by his achievement but with his elegance and cool graciousness. Here was a young man on whom fortune smiled, one destined for fame and success.

What a tragic end to so much promise these past weeks have been.

The very possibility of a popular hero like O.J. Simpson on death row awaiting execution makes us think twice about the kind of people who can end up there. It is easy and sometimes convenient to think of criminals as creatures altogether different from ourselves. But we are all a mix of good and evil. One who has committed a most heinous crime may also have the capacity for and display in other circumstances compassion, friendship and affection. In another life I was for many years a teacher in a select high school for boys. Three of the students that I know of went on to become murderers. At the time I knew them, one was by anybody's standards a nice boy, one was wild but likeable, only one showed early on a streak of meanness.

Which prompts us to pray more fervently than ever that we ourselves be delivered from evil. What keeps us from disaster is not so much our own virtue and strength as God's grace shielding us from temptations too strong and aiding us in the challenges we do face.

In Christ,



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September, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

A couple of weeks ago I was in Los Angeles in the Westwood area and went by the imposing Federal Building on Wilshire Boulevard. The sight brought back memories of a time probably twenty years past that I was there as part of a mass demonstration. For the life of me I couldn't remember what it was we were protesting.

Ten or so years ago while I was in Rome I went to a prayer vigil in front of one of the embassies. On the way I met a young seminarian I knew from the American College who accepted my invitation to come along. Once again I don't remember which embassy it was or what we were praying about. What I do remember is a young man obviously caught up in a time warp. The priest-to-be was involved in the unfamiliar rituals of a generation past.

I don't want to give the impression that my participation in the age of Aquarius was anything but safe and marginal. I was a continent away from Woodstock and geographically and psychologically equally remote from most of the other events that shaped and defined those times.

The media's 25th anniversary rerun this past month of the days of love-ins and face-offs did stir a bit of nostalgia, though. Styles and means may change but making love, promoting peace, naming evil, demanding justice should never really be out of date.

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October, 1994

Dear Members of Saint Thomas Parish,

The Catholic Church in the United States has been an immigrant Church. Most of us are the children and the grandchildren of Irish, Italian, German or Polish forebears who came to this country searching for a decent life for themselves and their children. The Church's strong voice protecting workers' rights, her fight against discrimination and her care of the needy and the unprotected have been a large factor in the fact that for the most part those dreams have come true.

Out of our own experience and guided by the consistent social teaching of the Church we have to make decisions within the current ferment over immigration within the State of California.

There is general agreement that present policies and practices need study and revision. The California Catholic Conference of bishops have warned, however, that one response to the situation, Proposition 187, is neither effective nor moral.

According to the bishops' analysis, Proposition 187 would:

Cost taxpayers \$15 billion in federal funds no longer receivable

Put up to 400,000 children out of school and on the street with nothing to do and nowhere to go

Risk public health by denying immunizations and not providing medical care

Divert police resources away from crime prevention by requiring officers to do the work of immigration agents

Create new bureaucracies to be administered by doctors and nurses, teachers and social service workers.

As Cardinal Mahony has rightly observed, "Proposition 187 will be harmful not only to those who are its targets but to the broader community as well."

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December, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

All of us have Christmas Past that stay with us. I had such a one some years ago visiting with Fr. Steve Ochoa in Peru. Fr. Steve was stationed at that time in Chulaco, a village half way up the Andes. Getting there was itself unforgettable. Magic Mountain has no ride to match the thrills of that road switchbacking crazily up crags and canyons. I know fear of falling off the earth is ridiculous but with the height and the slope, even standing still in Chulaco I felt better holding on to something. The church was a basic barracks-like structure with a concrete floor and no adornment. As everywhere in the region the people were poor, subsisting on small terraced fields of corn.

In those surroundings we had a Christmas eve pageant. There were few props and no artificial scenery. When the story called for shepherds, into the church came shepherds along with bleating, smelly sheep. Mary rode to the stable on a real donkey and in the crib there was a live baby. The actors generally followed the story line but didn't hesitate to add a personal touch. Herod, I remember, was a real ham with a great comic gift. His role tended to expand, much to the delight of the crowd.

What I remember most, though, was the audience. It hardly seemed to be an audience at all, everybody in the church was so much into the drama. They knew the story and were one with it. The angels that first night could not have beheld the Christ child with more awe and reverence than those villagers gazed on their brown skinned infant in the manger.

It has been said that Christmas is for children. I don't believe that. Mary, Joseph, the Magi, the shepherds were all adults. It does take some simplicity, though. God made himself small to come among us and the humble are always the most ready to welcome him.

In Christ,



1919

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1994