



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
Ojai, California 93023

1995  
January, 1994

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Every once in a great while just to justify the expense of getting me a degree in math and physics, I read a science book. Right now I am plowing through "Light at the Edge of the Universe" by Michael Lemonick. For an armchair astronomer like myself it is rough going. As always, though, even a peek at the universe boggles the mind. Have you heard about the Great Wall, a sheet of galaxies five hundred million light-years long? Did you know that even with space probes and the most advanced lenses and equipment, only about 10% of the universe is observable to us? That 17 billion years ago is a good guess for when it all got started?

Somewhat more recently than that I was treated to Lee Oskar and Friends, a concert at Wheeler Hot Springs. Probably because I have so little talent in the area myself, music is for me the most mysterious of the arts. How does the Big Bang or any unifying electro-magnetic theory of the universe explain such glorious sound?

Back in October I attended Mary Luna at her death. With amazing trust she had given into God's hands her health, her family and finally her life. How could heredity or environment account for such a triumph over every natural impulse?

Just examples from another year gone by in a world of wonders -natural, human and supernatural.

In Christ,

*Fr. Pat*



1919

St. Thomas Aquinas **75** Diamond Jubilee



1994



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February 1995

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Geologic forces, unimaginable heat and countless ages work together to produce a diamond. The result is a gem unsurpassed not only in beauty but in hardness.

A diamond jubilee is not just a milestone marking 75 years. Sorrows and joys, hurts and reconciliation, achievements and disappointments have had their effect on people. If the fire of charity has been present throughout, a true community of faith has been forged. There is a strength and grace only long experience together can produce.

In the Scriptures, a Jubilee year is a remarkable occurrence. The fields lie fallow, slaves are set free, debts are cancelled. Once again each family regains its ancestral lands. It is a time of grace when the iniquities and inequalities of the past are set straight and a new beginning made towards living the Kingdom of God.

As we move into our 76th year as a parish, we have much to praise God for, much to thank our predecessors for and much to look forward to. With God's help may we bring to fulfillment the good work already so well begun.

In Christ,



1919

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April, 1995

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

With parishes going into small Christian communities and individuals everywhere seeking out support groups of one kind or another, I suppose it should be no surprise that kids are getting into gangs.

The young people don't know the big words to describe it but they are experiencing the same sense of isolation and alienation as their parents. The breakdown of families, absence of kinfolk, impersonal neighborhoods and the individualism of our society leaves all of us looking for a place "where everybody knows your name." Even a Shangri-La like Ojai is not immune.

Gangs are seen as a threat because of the violence and lawlessness they often generate. Some of the things we can do to avoid or lessen the threat are:

Provide communities where young people have a strong sense of acceptance and belonging. If the family, the church, the school are experienced as theirs and for them, young people will feel less need to go looking for security and support elsewhere.

Provide alternatives. Kids busy with fun and friends usually don't have time for trouble. Youth Groups, athletic teams, activities and programs of all kinds can be healthy substitutes.

Meet and deal understandingly with kids wherever they are. In some places, churches and church people are doing good work with gangs and within the gang structure.

Sincerely,

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



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
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June, 1995

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

The summer promises to be a veritable bonanza of professions, ordinations, and First Masses. The bounty began in Japan May 27 with the priestly ordination of Bob and Ellie Nelson's son Bill. Bill is the first from the parish to become a priest and will be working in the Neo-Catechumenate movement. He returns to Ojai for a visit and will celebrate his First Mass in the church on July 2. Our own Allan Doane will be ordained to the permanent diaconate somewhere on June 10. We will see Allan as deacon in the Mass for the first time Fathers Day, June 18. An Augustinian, Tom Verber, will make his first profession of vows at Villanova Prep August 25. The next day, August 26, in the church, Jim Retzner will be ordained a priest, the first ordination celebrated in the parish. Jim will have his First Mass Sunday, August 27.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every summer were similar! Our season of plenty doesn't mean the vocation drought is over but we can hope some seeds will have been planted. A vocation is a private matter, a call issued by name from God. He speaks though, within and without. Our own St. Augustine is a case in point. Augustine felt no desire to be a priest. He was visiting in the port town Hippo, the church needed a priest, the people spotted a likely candidate and dragged him as he says "weeping" to ordination.

I am not suggesting we hog-tie suitable men and women and haul them off to seminaries and convents. A bit of persuasion, though, can be helpful. There is an old African proverb that it takes an entire village to raise a child. It probably also takes a whole parish encouraging, supporting, working together to raise up a religious sister, brother or priest.

In Christ,



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July, 1995

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Saying goodbye to Caryn Brady, our youth minister, and searching for her replacement reminds us how important that position is and the support it calls for. Passing on the Faith and caring for the needs of young people through one of the most difficult periods of their lives, is not a responsibility we can delegate to an individual no matter how well qualified and how dedicated. It is the job of the entire parish.

As a society, we are far from preoccupied with the well being of the next generation. We tend to take care of ourselves and the present even at the expense of those to come after. This morning's paper (Ventura County Star 6/21/95) featured a front page coverage of the plight of California children and teenagers. Conclusions: beyond the national average they are neglected, unemployed, under educated and at risk. The study rightly warns the situation has grave implications for the state's economy and social fabric.

Prevailing attitudes have a way of effecting church congregations as well as other institutions. As we move ahead with parish planning we have to be sure that our priorities are right.

Most people have heard that the Church is to have a preferential option for the poor. While she cares for and ministers to all, those on the margins are to be her special concern. Pope John Paul II insists there is a second preferential option, for the young. While the parish responds to the needs of all, the young are to be looked after with particular solicitude.

Even though there are not many tots or teenagers on the Liturgy or Finance Committee, the Planning Board or the Pastoral Council, a first concern of every decision everywhere has to be how will it effect the youth. Far more than economics and social harmony is at stake.

In Christ,



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September, 1995

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Epistemology is the study of how we know what is true and ethics the study of how we know what is good. Both are courses for philosophers but both have important consequences for ordinary people in everyday life.

At least in traditional Catholic philosophy, epistemology is rooted in common sense: trust your senses, listen to other people, use your head. One area where discovering the truth is essential is the legal system. The great TV trials of our time, though, seem bent on undermining confidence in the ability to do just that. The Rodney King verdict declared that what the whole country saw didn't really happen. The Melendez jury decided two such nice young men wouldn't kill their parents in cold blood even though they said they had. The O. J. Simpson trial spares no time, expense or expertise to show that nothing can be inferred or deduced from anything else. As one of the excused jurors remarked, "just because Nicole's blood is on O. J.'s sock doesn't prove he killed her."

When people lose confidence in their ability to find the truth, one opinion is as good as another.

August 14, 1945 we dropped the atom bomb. 50 years later and four trillion dollars spent on producing more such weapons, the country still is unable to decide if it was a good decision or not. Vatican II, Pope John Paul II, and the American Bishops do not speak explicitly about Hiroshima and Nagasaki but they do outline principals for making moral decisions.

When people don't agree on such principals they are left with pragmatism - whatever works. That seems to be the bottom line of most of the discussions and articles on the anniversary of what may have been the most important decision of our era, "it ended the war, didn't it?"

In Christ,

*Pat*



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October, 1995

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

The Womens Conference that ended in Beijing this past month made the news but never the headlines. Compared to the war in Bosnia, the O. J. Simpson trial or crime in the streets it was of secondary interest. The conference may or may not have been a significant event in the women's movement but it would be a mistake, I think, to underestimate the importance of the movement itself.

Race relations, economic conditions, international politics, national concerns are all surface issues compared to the basic relationship between men and women. On that relationship depends our understanding of what it means to be human, how families function and all societies operate. The great continental plates deep in the earth do not have to shift much to rearrange the mountain ranges and the cities resting on them. In the same way changing attitudes about and between the sexes alter all human institutions and structures.

The Holy Father, fearless leader that he is, has recently addressed a letter to women. The American bishops in their accumulated wisdom have tried twice to draft one and, as far as I know, given up. Far be it from me to even try.

I can't help having some personal opinions, though. I think the women's movement may have the most far reaching, lasting consequences of anything happening in our time. I think there would be no such movement without the Christian faith and the Church. It was the Scriptures that planted the seed that all people are equal and to be equally respected. In spite of much bad press and some issues still to be resolved, it was the Church that first gave roles of importance and influence to women. It is in the Church that Mary and a host of splendid women are revered and honored. If the women's issue is so important and if our faith has so much to offer it, I think it would be a great tragedy if women of faith are not its key molders and shapers.

In Christ,



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December, 1995

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

One of the things I was grateful for this Thanksgiving was the bishops' statement at their annual meeting in Washington opposing the welfare reform measures pending in Congress. I have not read the document yet but from news reports the bishops have insisted that efforts to balance the budget and reduce the deficit not be made by taking essential services and protection away from those most in need. There seems to be at present a tendency to see the poor not only as responsible for their own plight but also the cause of all society's ills. From being seen as an embarrassment and a nuisance they are now viewed as a threat as well.

The bishops' position is a reminder that religion has many voices in America and no single group can claim to speak for all, not even for all Christians. The Christian Coalition, and any number of similar groups that make up what is loosely termed the religious right, have every right to speak their mind publicly and try to influence policy but on many issues they do not speak for me nor do some of their positions seem to be particularly Christian. We agree on the rights of the unborn and the value of the family but don't see eye to eye on the iniquity in the present distribution of wealth nor the role of government to effect a measure of equity. It is reassuring to hear proposals to today's problems that seem consistent with a long tradition of Catholic social teaching which is itself rooted in Scripture's care for the needy and the marginal.

Right on, your Eminences and Excellencies! You're talking for me.

In Christ,

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