



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
Ojai, California 93023

January, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

I read one time in a scientific book that it is not inconceivable that time runs in more than one direction. I haven't got a clue what that might mean. In the King Arthur legend, Merlin the Magician traveled through time backwards but he is the only person I ever heard of that wasn't going the same way as everybody else and he is a magician in a legend.

Whatever science says about time, our faith assures us that it has a religious direction and is moving toward a goal. Age after age prepares for and looks forward to the return of Christ and the final triumph of his kingdom.

As we begin a new year, it is customary to exchange wishes for happiness, good health and success. Because good wishes aren't enough, it is also the time for making resolutions. We dream a bright future and take some responsibility to bring it about.

It is good to remember that we are not dreaming and working alone. Scripture tells us: "Eye has not seen nor ear heard nor has it so much as entered into the heart of man what good things God has prepared for those who love him."

We have had good days and bad in the past and nobody knows what the new year will bring. We do know that we are all moving forward and God is with us every moment. Amidst so much darkness and gloom, we are called to be people of hope. The best is yet to come.

In Christ,



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February, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

For people who have supposedly put themselves in the hands of the Lord, religious can seem to do an awful lot of planning. The Augustinians meet in Rome from around the world every six years to set the course for the next administration and three years later come back together again to evaluate progress. A Province does the same every four years with a review after two. Each community is to set yearly goals and priorities and discuss monthly. The California Province gets together annually, in January, to review, renew and revise.

And it is not just religious that are into meetings. There are Regional Synods, Episcopal Conferences, Diocesan Convocations, congresses, workshops and gatherings of every nature, size and shape.

Why do people of faith, committed to doing God's will, have to spend so much time and effort trying to figure out what to do next? For one thing, wanting to do God's will and knowing just what it is are two different things and it can take much prayer, scripture, reflection and discussion for a group to move together from one to the other. In times of great and rapid change that discernment has to be an on-going process.

The California Province Augustinians this past month spent three days together in San Diego examining our common life and how with our changing resources we can best serve the Church's changing needs. It may seem a luxury to drop everything and go off like that but what goes for long unexamined and unchanging easily becomes ineffective routine.

Many, maybe most, people can't take time off and go away to plan. A marriage or a family or a parish, though, needs every once in a while to take a look at itself, prayerfully consider what God is calling it to be and carefully ponder what needs to be done to move from what is to what could be.

In Christ,



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April, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

In a little while many of the young people will be out of school celebrating Spring Break. Even in a climate as temperate as Ojai's, Spring is something to celebrate. Our brown hills turn luxuriant green, trees are heavy with expectant buds and days are long and balmy.

Spring is a time of promise. The ripeness of Summer is just ahead. But Summer leads to Fall and there's the rub. Fall is prelude to another Winter.

We need more than a Spring Break. Spring proclaims that bad times don't last forever. Winters eventually thaw, systems as powerful and intractable as Communism crumble, scars heal and disappear. But one problem often gets replaced by another. The deadly tantrums of El Nino had scarcely subsided when a giant asteroid appeared hurtling on a collision course with planet earth. People had just recovered from Hong Kong flu when the Australian variety showed up. As a deep thinker and astute observer once remarked: "It's one thing after another."

The good times for their part are fragile and passing. Health, prosperity, happiness don't come with a warranty.

That's why we need Easter. Easter celebrates the fact that Jesus rose triumphant from the dead. The full implications touch everything and everyone. Through Jesus's victory, the power of darkness, evil and death has been destroyed. The final outcome of history, who wins the struggle between good and evil, has already been decided. Love, light, life prevail. There will be a time we can look forward to when happiness is unending and unthreatened.

A week to frolic is only fitting for Spring. We could spend our lives shouting Alleluia for Easter.

In Christ,

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



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
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185 St. Thomas Drive  
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May, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Any day now we should be moving into Bethany Hall. Although the building was blessed some months ago, one problem after another has delayed the written approval to enter and use. As far as I know, all obstacles have been met and we can occupy the facility.

What occasioned building the annex is the fact that the religious education program was spilling into every corner and closet on the property. Both the Spanish speaking CCD Wednesday evenings and the English program Sunday mornings had classes going on in places never designed for teaching. If one has to have problems, an abundance of students is a good one to have. The six additional classrooms, office for the Director of Religious Education and workroom for teachers should, still using some rooms at Aquinas Center, provide quite adequately for our present religious education programs.

While it is true religious education is not something just for children, the new building should be a reminder that passing on the Faith to the next generation is a vital ministry for the whole parish. CCD classes, sacramental preparations, Jr.-High and Youth Ministry call for interest and support from every member of the parish. As we come to the close of another school year, I offer my thanks and congratulations to all the administrators, teachers, aides and volunteers who have been part of our various youth ministries.

To paraphrase a well known saying: It takes an entire parish to evangelize a single child.

In Christ,

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



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June, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

What essentially constitutes the parish as a community is our shared faith in Jesus and our membership in the Catholic Church. The calendar that primarily records our life together is the Ordo, the progression of feasts and seasons that make up the liturgical year.

Full community, though, is a matter of more than belief and enrollment. For full communion there must be some level of shared support, shared ministry and shared experience. We can thrill to the universality of the Church attending Mass with the colorfully garbed, polyglot, multi-hued throngs in St. Peters, Rome, or in an exotic setting of the foreign missions but the body of Christ takes form most concretely in the familiar faces of those we know, whose stories we are part of, who struggle with us as witnesses and disciples in this same place under the same difficulties. In a similar way, we can be inspired by cathedrals and shrines of spectacular beauty but the building that uniquely gives a visible form to Church for us is the church built and maintained by our own sacrifices and contributions.

If the Ordo in the sacristy with its solemnities and novenas and feasts records the heart of our life together, the Master Calendar in the office recounts its fullness. Meetings and classes; special collections, ticket sales and appeals of all kinds; housing the homeless and feeding the hungry; wedding receptions and funeral receptions; coffee and donuts, barbecues and potluck suppers; retreats and workshops and outings; all are ways of living out the vision and values and mission of Christ in this particular place. The festival we just had raised a bit of money, made or strengthened some acquaintances and, not just accidentally, helped us worship better together.

In Christ,

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



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July, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

July is an unlikely month to be writing about funerals but the topic has been on my mind. With the changing times, and now with a new attitude by the Church toward cremation, the purpose and value of Christian burial seems to be less clear.

St. Augustine observed way back in the fourth century that funeral rites are more for the living than the dead. By that he did not mean to question the value of prayers for the dead. The funeral ceremonies themselves, though, are designed with the mourners in mind. By the way any people bury their dead, we can know what those peoples' attitude is not only toward the individual just deceased but what they believe about the after life. The funeral rite is meant to remind the living that death awaits each of us, to recall and strengthen our belief in the salvation won for us by Christ and to affirm our hope in the resurrection of the body/soul. By the funeral liturgies the Church also tries to support and console the mourners through their grieving.

If the services are designed with the mourners in mind, it is the deceased who is the subject of the intercession. Except for the most extreme and exceptional cases, every member of the Church has a right to Christian burial. Each of us has a right to expect that we will receive at the proper time the sacraments that prepare us for death, will be commended to our maker within the sacrifice of Jesus that won our salvation, will be accompanied by the prayers of the faithful and that we will be placed in sacred space to await the resurrection. The last is as true now for ashes as for the body.

Concern for expenses and a desire not to burden others may lead to directions about ones's own arrangements at death that are well intentioned but not wise. Nobody needs, and the Church certainly doesn't promote, expensive caskets, banks of flowers and elaborate ceremonies but we need in death as we did in life the grace of Christ and the support of the Church. Grieving can be put off but usually not avoided and we don't often help those left behind by depriving them of the condolences and the reassurances of the faith community.

Burying the dead is different from praying for the dead and a Funeral Mass is different from a Memorial Mass. The burial of the dead, the new Catechism reminds us, is still a corporal work of mercy; "it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit."

In Christ,



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September, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish,

More and more parishes across the United States are offering parishioners the opportunity to come together in small groups to examine and focus their lives in the light of the Scriptures and a shared Catholic faith. There are at least three reasons why the movement is so popular:

1. Our society is increasingly non-supportive of traditional Christian values. At no time has it been easy to live the message of the Gospel but there was a time when society at least professed respect for Christian truth and morals. For our parents and grandparents, there was a fairly widespread agreement at least on what is common decency. That is no longer true.

2. The a-Christian, a-moral world enters increasingly into our homes and families. That is particularly true via television. The problem with TV is not simply the amount of sex and violence. There is, after all, a fair amount of both in the Bible. The more insidious danger with TV, the movies and most of the media is that it envelopes us in a world where God and religion have been carefully filtered out. If the media is our eye on the real world out there, then religion is a purely private affair of no great significance.

3. For better or for worse, what has been labeled the Catholic Ghetto has largely disappeared. All my parents friends were Catholic, no one was divorced and nobody's children had left the Faith. My mother and father had no need to look for a support group to find affirmation and agreement on how they were trying to raise a family. Most families today operate in a totally different world.

These factors, and others as well, mean that many sincere people of Faith feel the need to supplement Sunday parish worship with informal discussion of day-to-day issues.

The St. Thomas Aquinas Adult Education Committee has studied various programs and will soon be offering just such an opportunity.

Small Groups may not be for everyone but for many they provide invaluable support and insights into leading a Christ centered, authentically Catholic life. I urge everyone to seriously consider joining such a group.

In Christ



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December, 1998

Dear Members of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish,

A few months back I visited the place where Jesus was born. At least I climbed down into a sort of hollow under a church in Bethlehem where tradition says he might have been born. I also saw the spot in Jerusalem where most likely he was crucified and where his body was laid. I celebrated Mass on a rise by the Sea of Galilee where he may well have multiplied the loaves and fishes. In Capharnaum, I peered into a house, still extant, where he cured St. Peter's mother-in-law. I prayed beneath what may be the same olive trees he prayed under at Gethsemane and trod the very stones his feet trod on the temple square.

A trip to the Holy Land brings home in a dramatic way the particularity of the Incarnation. The second person of the Trinity did not just assume human nature but became a man, a unique individual. Jesus was a Jew of a specific time and place. His viewpoint was that of an itinerant rabbi from Galilee preaching not long before the Jewish revolt against Rome. He was shaped by his family and friends and the culture and events he was part of. His life spanned about 30 years and took him over an area about the size of New Jersey. Knowledge of that tiny slice of history and familiarity with that tiny piece of geography help us understand him better.

The resurrection and ascension broke the time-space constraints of his particularity. Jesus who 2000 years ago was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, preached in Capharnaum and died in Jerusalem, through the mystery of the Church, can now be present in Ojai. Each time the poor are fed, the homeless are sheltered, the grieving are comforted, the lonely are visited, he is here. Each time we have Mass, he is present here. At every Baptism, Confirmation or Reconciliation he is present here. Day and night in the reserved Eucharist, he is present here.

This Christmas we need not go on pilgrimage to far off Holy Places. As truly as Jesus was born and welcomed into the family of Mary and Joseph, he will come and live in our community.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "The Fathers".