



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive
Ojai, California 93023

January 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

"Sunday....becomes a synthesis of the Christian life and a condition for living it well." So says the Holy Father in his recent apostolic letter On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy. The letter is a lengthy, deep and moving appeal to restore Sunday to its traditional place in Christian observance as we prepare for the millennium.

The pope first of all recalls Sunday's roots in the Scripture's Sabbath - a day when creation, completed in six days, joyfully praises its creator. The first of the covenant commandments linking God and his people is the injunction to keep holy the Sabbath. It is in remembering, reflecting on and praising God for his wonderful deeds that the people are formed and nourished as his own. To these universal reasons for praise, Christianity has added the resurrection, when Christ's victory over death inaugurated a new creation. Because Christ rose on Sunday, the first day of the week rather than the last gradually became the Dies Domini, the day of the Lord.

Even before Sunday could be observed as a day of rest, it was the day Christians gathered for Eucharist. Sometimes in secret and in danger, they came together to experience the presence of their risen Lord, to listen to the Word and to be nourished by his body and blood. Cardinal Mahony's letter making a vital, active celebration of Sunday Eucharist the Archdiocese's principal way of getting ready for the millennium anticipated and fits in with the Holy Father's letter making renewed Sunday observance part of the universal Church's preparation. In both letters, Sunday is Dies ecclesiae, the day of the Church.

In our culture, the weekend has tended to take over and replace Sunday. The weekend is a uniform block of time from the end of work or school on Friday till the start-up again on Monday. On the weekend people do the shopping, chores, recreation they couldn't get in the other five days. Mass is often just one of the many things to get in on the weekend. Sunday is meant to be different. We need some time for leisure, family, visits, exploring. Sunday is also Dies hominis, a day for people.

The pope and the cardinal both see a renewed observation of Sunday as an important preparation for the new millennium. What better resolution for the New Year than as a family to develop the traditions, customs and practices that make Sunday different from other days, truly the Dies dierum, the day of days.

In Christ,



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March 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Those people we see being "dismissed" each Sunday before the Creed are even more the center of attention these weeks of Lent. On the first Sunday, we sent our catechumens and candidates to Blessed Junipero Serra Parish in Camarillo to be received, along with their counterparts from all the other parishes of the area, by Bishop Curry, our regional bishop. On the third, fourth and fifth Sundays we bless and encourage them in the Scrutinies.

For those to be baptized or to complete their initiation at the vigil on Holy Saturday, Lent is the final period of preparation. They have heard Jesus' call and are ready publicly to proclaim themselves his disciples. For up to two years they have studied what the Church teaches and experienced her community and they are anxious for Eucharist and the sacramental life.

Not just for catechumens and candidates but for the parish itself this preparation for baptism at the Holy Saturday vigil is the liturgical focus of Lent. As a community preparing new members for initiation, all of us need to reflect on, renew and deepen our own commitment to Christ and his Church made through our baptism. Conversion is not a single event but the process of a lifetime. Year after year as we renew our baptismal vows at Easter, we recite the ancient formula with added experience and, it is to be hoped, deeper faith and greater love.

That conversion process is threefold. It involves an emptying of self that reveals our neediness and makes us conscious of our hunger for God, fasting. It involves a turning to God as our hope and final joy, prayer. It involves seeing Christ in others and meeting their needs with compassion, almsgiving.

In Christ,

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



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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185 St. Thomas Drive
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April, 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

After a lapse of a year, the Resurrection Cross behind the altar is back again in full glory.

It seems to me the cross resplendent is a good symbol for the mystery of Easter. On Calvary, God doesn't somehow snatch victory out of defeat like a last minute score in a ball game or a turn in the tide of battle. He doesn't just defeat sin and its consequences but rather turns the whole situation inside out. Through Jesus' obedience and trust, suffering and death are transformed and become not the way of punishment and dissolution but means to life and exaltation.

In Jesus' glorified body, his wounds have not healed over and disappeared. They are forever adornment and marks of honor.

So, too, our heartaches, suffering and eventual death are not just ordeals to be endured but experiences that can expand and shape our capacity for love and life. All our crosses, too, can be transformed.

In Christ,

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



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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185 St. Thomas Drive
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May, 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Once again, in the Balkans, the United States is involved in forceful intervention. Once again, people wonder if such use of force is justified.

There are those who see violence as always opposed to the gospel. Although there is a growing sentiment against war, such absolute pacifism is not clear Catholic teaching. What we do have is a set of conditions tracing back to St. Augustine known as the "Just War Theory." They are not always the arguments discussed on TV or presented by the Pentagon or the White House and it may be helpful to review them.

1. Is it a good cause? St. Augustine himself found it easier to justify violence in somebody else's defense than in one's own. Whether or not there is oil in Kosovo or whether or not Yugoslavia is vital to our national security, the killing and displacement of innocent people justifies a response.

2. Have all other means failed and is violence truly the last and only resort? There are sociopaths for whom ordinary deterrents and motivation do not work but do we put as much into avoiding war beforehand as winning it once it has begun? Just in terms of money, the war is costing \$6,000,000 a day. What could waging peace on such a scale accomplish?

3. Are only just means used? With our somewhat unhappy experience of "limited" warfare and our expectation of quick fixes, there is a tendency to be impatient over deliberations about means. "Do whatever it takes" is the typical response to every challenge. But the legitimate object of our violence is not the people and survival of Serbia, particularly not the children, the elderly, the helpless.

4. Is the damage anticipated proportional to the good to be achieved? We tend to count the cost in terms of American lives and American dollars. Americans, Serbs and Albanians are equally precious to God, though, and not just the impact on our economy is to be weighed but the havoc and devastation in the region under attack and the disruption to the neighboring countries as well.

5. Is there reasonable hope of success? The original idea seems to have been that if the Serbian military apparatus was crippled or destroyed, the ethnic cleansing of Albanians would cease. In Rwanda, though, 800,000 innocent civilians were wiped out mostly with clubs and machetes. Hatred doesn't need very sophisticated weapons.

By the classic criteria, it seems as if our armed intervention in the Balkans can be justified. The problem may be that there are more and more places where similar intervention can also be justified.

In Christ,



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June, 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Once again the California legislature is considering a physician assisted suicide measure, AB 1592 the Death with Dignity Act. Granted the zeal of the euthanasia movement, it seems likely that the issue will again be on the ballot for California voters.

The notion of death with dignity is an interesting one. Birth and death are not, on the face of it, very dignified events. If we had demanded a fitting entrance who would be here? Birth is by its nature messy and inelegant. Once arrived, the new born is hardly impressive. It is love that enables the parents to see that junior is precious even when he poos in his diaper and up-chucks his formula. Love helps the parents to see this but society, too, has the obligation to treasure and protect this latest member, himself so helpless.

If our entrance is hardly stately, our departure may be even less so. But grandma hasn't lost her inherent worth because she has become incontinent or there is a speck of spittle on her chin. The family she has begotten and cared for so many years should know this and society must be especially concerned for her as one of its weakest and most vulnerable members.

Birth and death get their meaning not from external standards of decorum and comfort. Jesus' death by crucifixion was hardly "dignified" yet it saved the world. Every birth and every death is awesome because it ushers into temporal or eternal life a person of inestimable value. The person has inherent dignity unaffected by the circumstances of coming or going. Human life is a sacred gift from God.

Part of our current difficulty in making moral decisions is the exaggerated emphasis given to choice. Suicide, abortion, euthanasia become good simply because they are chosen. But to kill one's children, to kill one's parents, to kill one's patients, to kill one's self, even to kill one's enemies are bad choices no matter how free the choice may be.

In Christ,

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



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July, 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Every four years, according to our constitutions, each Augustinian province is to have a chapter, or general meeting. The purpose is to elect leadership and plan for the succeeding four years. This past month the Augustinians of the west coast met at Villanova Prep for such a meeting. A good deal of time was spent on the specifics of our own communities and ministries but some of what happened those days is of general interest and importance.

It was a time of renewing and strengthening friendship. There was plenty of time for relaxing, catching up on one another's stories and enjoying each other's company. St. Augustine saw religious life as basically a community of friends. The purpose of coming together was "to be of one mind and one heart intent on God" and for him the one heart was at least as important as one mind. Sometimes a religious house or a church or a committee or maybe even a family becomes so intent on efficiency, strategy and success that it ceases to be a friendly community and becomes more like a competitive business.

It was a time of getting back to basics. Each day began with a communal reading of the province mission statement, a succinct expression of what we see ourselves called to be and to do. In the hassle of day-to-day decisions and emergency responses, underlying goals can get lost. From time to time there is need to refresh ourselves on why we are together and what are we really about.

It was a time of getting the bigger picture. The president of the chapter was an Assistant General, Fr. Art Purcaro, who arrived from England and left heading for Poland. He brought news and good wishes from the General Curia in Rome and people and places throughout the Augustinian world. One morning was devoted to a study of the pope's Apostolic Letter on the Church in America. Each province, as each parish, each program is an important part, but only a small part, of the universal Church, called to promote not itself but the Kingdom of God.

In Christ,

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



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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September, 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

The basic unit of Catholic Church organization is the parish. By law, its function and structure is the same throughout the world. In fact, each parish is a bit different from every other. A parish in Philadelphia is just not quite the same as one in Los Angeles. An Irish parish will have a little different feel to it than a Filipino one. A parish serving mainly professional people operates a little differently from one serving blue collar workers.

If a parish is entrusted to a religious community, that too will add a distinctive note. The Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, or any Order, have their own spirit and that spirit affects works and ministries.

The Augustinian charism may be hard to identify and describe but there are certain characteristics of St. Augustine himself that we would like to think continue in Augustinians and their apostolates.

St. Augustine was a searcher, a restless heart. Life for him was a never ending quest. "He who says 'enough' is finished", he wrote.

Augustine's search was directed primarily within himself. "Let me know myself, that I may know Thee", he prayed to God. Augustinian interest is always more on what is happening inside than on external growth or development.

Charity is the summit of the virtues for every Christian but for Augustine it came more and more to be the only consideration. His "love, and do what you will" can be misunderstood and abused but charity is the Augustinian charism and the final standard for any Augustinian work.

For Augustine, charity expresses itself in friendship. "If a man (or woman) would find God, let him have friends." An Augustinian religious community or parish is basically a group of friends searching for God together.

If Augustine came to emphasize love and the will, he was also from beginning to end a student of truth. Augustinians, and those ministered to by Augustinians, don't all have Augustine's colossal intellect but serious study is part of the Augustinian legacy.

Loving, friendly, spiritual, open, studious - are these the words that come to mind when thinking of our parish?

In Christ,

St. J. P. T.



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH
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November, 1999

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

No matter how you package it, it is still the same.

There has always been a strain of anti-Catholic bigotry in the United States. Often, in the early days, it was associated with fear that the latest wave of unwashed, uneducated Catholic immigrants would swamp the delicate balance of political freedom, economic opportunities and intellectual ferment that the new republic had created. From time to time the hatred erupted in acts of violence - churches burnt, individuals attacked - but more often it showed itself in a constant stream of propaganda. Cartoons depicted pope and bishops as rapacious predators, salacious "exposes" reported scandalous private lives of priests and nuns, Catholic symbols and rituals were mocked and reviled.

All in the past? All a sorry part of our history we would like to forget? I'm afraid not. Anti-Catholicism is the one prejudice that is still politically correct. In fact, its expression is now seen as proof of how tolerant our society has become. Bearded men lampoon nuns in civic celebrations. In the theater no portrayal of Jesus or Mary, priests or sisters is too outrageous or repugnant. In art whatever we consider sacred is subject matter for pornography and sacrilege. The resent furor over a painting in the Brooklyn Museum of Art showing the Virgin Mary surrounded by images of female parts and covered with elephant dung is just the latest example. All in the name of artistic creativity and freedom of expression.

For a number of years we have been helping to send the young people of Ojai to Los Angeles to visit the Museum of Tolerance. As the youngsters are exposed to a graphic experience of propaganda against the Jews - seeing them ridiculed in cartoons, demonized in posters, the Star of David and all their holy symbols desecrated - wouldn't it be ironic if they come away impressed by how civil and tolerant a society Germany must have been?

In Christ,

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



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January, 2000

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

We hear the words "millenium" and "jubilee" often these days and they can seem to be interchangeable. Actually, a millenium, like a decade or a century, is simply a matter of counting. Ready or not, whether we make anything of it or not, every thousand years one occurs. A jubilee, on the other hand, implies a conscious intention to make a time special. The idea of jubilee is rooted in Sacred Scripture and is part of God's covenant with his chosen people. Every seventh year was supposed to be a jubilee year and every fiftieth year a solemn jubilee. At jubilee, wrongs were to be righted, debts cancelled, family lands restored, slaves set free. The jubilee recognized God's absolute dominion and sought to make the state of Israel more like what the Kingdom of God should be.

The Holy Father wants to make the third millenium a major jubilee. He is calling on churches throughout the world to work and pray to make the year 2000 a holy year, inaugurating an era of peace, of material and spiritual well being.

There are some emphases that seem closest to his heart. As with the ancient jubilees, he is calling for renewed efforts to reduce poverty, secure basic human rights, protect the environment, promote peace. The whole rich tradition of the church's social teaching is to be studied and implemented.

By the end of the first thousand years, the faith had spread from the Mediterranean basin and covered all of Europe. In the second, it was brought to America and introduced to Africa and Asia. The 3rd millenium requires a new evangelization, bringing the good news where it has not yet been heard, proclaiming it afresh where it has grown old.

No pope has worked harder to bring understanding among the world's religions and unity among Christians. A holy year must be a year of healing, of joint efforts, of steps coming together.

Christ is lord of history. All time is measured from his coming as man, all time moves toward his return. The same Christ is present all our days as the source of life in the Blessed Sacrament. The new millenium year is to be intensely Eucharistic.

In Christ,