



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
Ojai, California 93023

January, 2003

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Our last end-of-year letter reflected on the 9/11 events that put the distinguishing stamp on that year. The suicide attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had struck at the two bastions of strength we had thought made us invincible - our military might and our economic dominance. It was a blow to our self image and sense of security from which we still have not fully recovered. We may never again have quite the sense of unassailable well being.

Sadly enough, we conclude this year on a similar theme. The institution under attack this time is not our armed forces or corporate wealth but the Church. The terrible damage has been done, for the most part, not by foreign fanatics hating what they destroy but by insiders with no intent to bring down or weaken the institution they were to serve - priests who abused their trust and bishops who covered for them. The result, though, has been the same. Will we ever see the former trust and confidence again?

Our Holy Father has designated the coming year as a "Year of the Rosary." The five mysteries recently added complete the cycle of Salvation brought about by Christ with the cooperation of Mary. Frequent and reflective use of the Rosary, quiet time before the Blessed Sacrament, attentive participation in the Mass are all ways to ground us in God, the one foundation that cannot be shaken.

In Christ,



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Feb 2003  
~~January, 2003~~

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

One of the major events occurring in February is the Religious Education Congress in Anaheim. I think it is the largest gathering of its kind and the scope is certainly impressive. There are thousands of participants, internationally known speakers, moving liturgies, a vast array of books and materials on display. Attending gives one a sense of the size and diversity of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, the richness of our Catholic heritage and the vitality of the religious education effort.

Teachers in our parish religious classes are subsidized to go. It is an opportunity to deepen an understanding of the Faith, improve ways of explaining it, and examine available resources. It is also an occasion to meet a multitude of enthusiastic fellow catechists and share experiences. The gathering should not only help instructors present the truth more fully and effectively but give a sense of the great work they are about.

The Congress reminds even those who do not attend of the essential place catechesis has in the life of the Church. The programs of religious education, sacramental preparation, and youth formation are all vital to the parish. They involve a limited number of young people and adults directly but shape the future for all of us and demand from all interest and support.

If the thousands who attend Congress are better informed, more proficient at teaching and more full of fire, it must change parishes and programs throughout the Archdiocese. Our prayers and hopes are for the success of the Congress.

In Christ,



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April, 2003

Dear members of St. Thomas Parish,

It is difficult to write at the beginning of March a letter that will come out the first of April about Easter which we will celebrate toward the end of the month and somehow have a timely message. Will we be at war? Will war have been fought and be over? Will a fragile peace still be holding? Will we be more anxious or feel more secure?

The answers to these questions, and so many other circumstances as well, affect the way we will be celebrating Easter. Always we go through the Church Year, with the cycle of seasons and feasts of the Lord, from a different point in our personal life and a new context of world events.

If the accidentals change, though, the essential Pascal message is always the same. Jesus died, but rose to new life. In doing so, he overcame death and the power of death. And the victory was not just personal and individual but universal. Love has won out over hatred, good has conquered evil, the light has routed the darkness. The conflict is not over but the outcome has been determined.

Easter is always a celebration of hope. The bearers of that hope proclaimed it often in the midst of hopelessness – the prophets in bitter exile, Mary's triumphant "Magnificat" during brutal foreign occupation, Jesus' "Into your hands..." while nailed to a cross.

Wherever and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves this Easter, the God who raised Jesus from the dead is with us. Whatever terrors threaten, his power is greater. As scripture says, "If God is for us, who can be against?"

In Christ,



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May, 2003

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Because Easter is so late this year, May, Mary's month, comes early in the Easter Season. It is only fitting that we remember Mary while we celebrate her son's triumph. She had given him flesh at Christmas, nurtured him through the growing years at Nazareth, prompted the first of his "signs" at Cana, followed him through his ministry and stood faithfully by the cross on Calvary. Is it any wonder that she is intimately associated with the glory of his vindication?

As the first and closest of his disciples, Mary cooperated fully in the mission of Jesus. From her "behold the handmaid of the Lord" response to the Angel Gabriel, to Jesus' "into your hands" surrender on the cross, Jesus and Mary were of one mind and heart together in God's loving plan of salvation. As a result, his resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand is mirrored in her assumption and coronation as Queen of Angels and Saints.

As the Church, the body of Christ, experiences today the pain and shame of the cross, we can be sure that Mary, as ever, is steadfastly standing by. As we celebrate the transformed, resplendent rising of our head from the grave, we count on Mary's care and intercession that we too will come from darkness into new light and life.

In Christ,

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



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June, 2003

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Putting together a budget involves more than accounting skills. How money is spent reflects the community's values. Who makes financial decisions depends on how the institution operates.

In the parish, the Finance Committee has the responsibility for preparing and monitoring a balanced budget. Each year the group tries to hold expenses in line with income. It is a matter of juggling bills and requests against contributions and fund raising. The former inevitably rise. So far, the latter have kept up. Even here, though, it is not just a matter of massaging the numbers. Are the salaries just? Are we supporting our youth as we should? Does worship get due prominence? Are we, as a community, responding to the needs around us? Are we keeping up the facilities or getting into delayed maintenance? In short, the budget is an exercise in stewardship, in using wisely the resources we have been given.

What is true on the parish level, applies also on a grand scale to the national budget. In a democracy, the budget does not reflect just the administration or the party in power but all of us. It is our values and our priorities that should be decisive. Is the cost of government distributed fairly? Is security paid for by education, health care and other basic needs? Will our bills have to be paid by other generations? Do we put our money behind the justice and compassion we proclaim? The national budget is an objective look at what kind of a society we really are. Behind all the rhetoric, what really are our values and priorities?

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Paul".

July, 2003

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

This past month one of our parishioners, Chris Gorman, was ordained a deacon. Although people are used to seeing our present deacon, Allan Doane, with the priest at Mass, many are still unfamiliar with the order of deacon and its role in the Church.

Actually, the diaconate is as old as the Church itself. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the Twelve called a meeting of all Jesus' disciples to select seven "filled with the Spirit and wisdom" who would look after the poor so that the apostles themselves could focus on prayer and preaching. For many years, deacons had an important role in the life of the Church.

As the centuries passed, that role became less prominent and eventually disappeared. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Council of Trent discussed restoring the diaconate but did not. The idea surfaced again at the Second Vatican Council and in 1967 Pope Paul VI reestablished the Order as a permanent ministry. A few months later, the U.S. bishops became among the first to train and ordain deacons. Their number and significance have continued to grow. At present in the United States, more than one in five ordained Catholic clergy are deacons.

The deacon's service is threefold: service of the Word, service of the altar and service of charity. Service of the Word includes proclaiming the Gospel, preaching, teaching, counseling, "speaking about Jesus" from the pulpit and in the marketplace. The deacon's service of the altar is most obvious at Mass but deacons also witness marriages, baptize, preside at funerals and conduct prayer services. The deacon's distinctive service is service of charity. As official, ordained ministers of the Church, they are involved in every kind of care, in speaking out for the silenced, in taking a stand on issues of peace and justice.

In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Diaconate Formation Program is a four-year course of studies, spirituality and practice.

Although ordained, deacons live in the world in the style of the laity. 90% are married and balance responsibilities as husband/father, wage earner and ordained minister. The Archdiocese recognizes the link between marriage and ordination and insists that wives concur in the vocation, take part in the formation and are invited to share in the ministry. Pertinent literature speaks about "the deacon couple."

The parish has been blessed with the witness and service of Deacon Allan Doane. We are further blessed with the new deacon couple, Chris and Dawn Gorman. Congratulations and thank you for responding so generously to God and the Church's call!

In Christ,



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November, 2003

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

The month of November begins with two great feasts, All Saints and All Souls. The first celebrates the martyrs and confessors, missionaries and mystics, hierarchs and hermits, holy women and holy men who are in Heaven with Mary and the angels face to face with God. The number includes laity, religious and priests, married people and single, well-born and low-born, of every nation and culture, young and old. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta is one of the latest proclaimed by the Church to be there. It is a company of immense diversity united in one bond of love.

All Souls commemorates those who have died united with Christ, who are sure to share with him the glory of his resurrection, but who at the time of death were still carrying the effects of sin. They are presently in a state of purification. That our condition for all eternity will be not exactly what it was at the moment of death but perfected and ready for the Banquet of Heaven, seems to me not only reasonable but comforting.

The saints in heaven, the souls in Purgatory and we still struggling make up the Communion of Saints, the whole Church. The Catholic Church stretches across the world, embracing peoples of all cultures, nationalities, classes. It also extends through the ages including believers of every century. It numbers those who have died along with those still living. Its wisdom values not just the insights of the present but the experience of the past. It is a true communion, each part joined in organic union with the others, the saints interceding for and encouraging the living, the living remembering and praying for the Faithful Departed, the Faithful Departed finding their wait softened by our concern and the nearness of the saints.

St. Augustine often spoke of the whole Church as the whole Christ, head and members. We are not only bound one to another but joined with Him, sharing his life, carrying his cross, rejoicing in his glory.

In Christ,  
*JK Pat*