

**ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS**

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

December, 1989

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Advent is a yearly reminder of God's continuing power to make all things new. When the world seemed old and locked into centuries long habits of oppression and hatred, a child was born bearing in his tiny body the promise of peace, of freedom, of good-will to all. God's activity is never bounded by our limitations nor His providence impeded by present circumstances. He continues to be a God of the unexpected, a God of surprises.

God does, however, make use of what is and what has been to create what will be. The Son was born into a world carefully prepared to receive Him. Prophets had foretold His coming, saintly men and women had progressively experienced and proclaimed the God who would be made manifest in the manager.

These reflections come to me as we begin our first Advent together. What God calls us to is greater than we can imagine and must seem far beyond our capabilities. To be Church is to be Christ so that the wonder of God present among us is experienced ever fresh and ever anew.

But just as Jesus took flesh with a particular genealogy having its own inherited traits and characteristics, so Christ comes alive here in a parish with its own history and particulars. Fr. Jim's enthusiasm and talent for organization, Fr. Tom's quiet dedication, Fr. Steve's and Fr. Harry's special gifts as well as the countless contributions of time, talent and self from parishioners make up the "genealogy" of Christ's embodiment here. No contribution has been lost.

We begin Advent, then, with a deep sense of respect and gratitude for what has gone before and we await with hope and anticipation God's unpredictable ways of shaping a community into a body for Himself, a form for manifesting ever more clearly his presence among us.

in Christ,



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

January, 1990

Dear Parishioners of St. Thomas Aquinas,

Another year has passed and sometimes I get the feeling of having missed it. By every published index, I was a non-participant. I saw none of the ten best movies, read none of the best-sellers nor watched any award winning T.V. I wasn't there at any of the great moments in sports and didn't feel the mighty earthquake. Nobody asked my advice on invading Panama nor my counsel on conditions in Eastern Europe. I did get my picture taken with the pope but it was a group shot and that's as close as I came to the molders and shapers of the year. 1989 seems to have gone by without me.

So there is comfort and reassurance as the Church puts before us in the liturgy of New Year's Day the image of Mary hidden away in a remote corner of the world reflecting on the wonders God had worked in her life. (Who, by the way, were the 25 most fascinating personalities of that year and what were the 5 most news worthy events?) Mary's recollections were not about the momentous events shaping the history of her time but of the loving action of God in her own life. Undisturbed by predictions and forecasts, she looked to the future without anxiety.

I know of no better New Year's wish than that we too may live in time as Mary did: all the past a memory of God's loving care, the present a total "yes" to his will, all the future peacefully in his keeping.

*H. Cat*

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

March, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Each year during Lent we are called to renew our faith through repentance, sacrifice, reflection and prayer. To help us in this effort this year, the liturgy committee has adopted a program called, "From Ashes to Easter," and shaped it to our own parish. The program makes use of the Sunday liturgies, group reflections and discussions and activities for the home.

The heart of the program is the Sunday liturgy. The scriptural and prayer texts of the weeks of Lent focus on initiation into the Pascal Mystery, that is, the death and resurrection of Christ. Each week a human experience and a religious symbol have been selected to lead us more deeply into this central mystery of our faith and the liturgies planned to highlight our journey.

The Monday evening soup suppers will pick up and follow through on the Sunday themes which will be developed further by a series of speakers and discussed in small groups. Stations of the Cross, with in-put by parishioners, will associate our day by day journey with the passage through death to life of Jesus.

And finally there are readings and suggested activities by which what was begun on Sunday can be taken home and reflected on through the week.

"From Ashes to Easter," as any program, will not automatically make saints of us nor even make us better. Conversion is always a matter of the heart open to God's grace and wanting to change. The program, however, does give a focus of Jesus so that at the end of Lent, Easter will be for us a joyful celebration of renewed life and faith in the risen Lord.

I invite you to participate as fully as you can in the program.

In Christ,

**ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS**

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

February, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

I think it was the theologian Karl Rahner who wrote that the most powerful shift that came about at Vatican Council II occurred not in any of the documents but rather when the participants saw themselves. As the twenty-three hundred plus bishops filed down down the majestic nave of St. Peter's, took their places in the specially constructed stands and looked across the marble pavement at one another, they saw mostly black, oriental and hispanic faces. The concentration of teachers had shifted from Europe and North America to Asia, Africa and South America. In a sense never realized before, the Church was Catholic, a truly world church.

The recent Anaheim Religious Education Congress is certainly not an Ecumenical Council but it did bring together an estimated twenty-six thousand Catholic teachers and ministers from all over the western states so it was a significant event in the life of the Church. Possibly again the make-up of those who attended may be as important as the contents of any of the papers given. I offer the impressions of someone (me) who has been away from the American scene a few years and just returned.

By far the most striking observation is that what one saw was laity. Granted that priests and religious have become harder to spot even when present, the overwhelming majority of teachers and ministers there were lay men and women. I, and everybody who grew up before Vatican II, was taught and cared for by priests, sisters and brothers. The Church was made present to me and I saw it through the medium of clergy and religious. Such is so obviously not the case now nor will be again in our lives. Catholics today learn about the Church and experience her care through lay people. Teacher and student, giver and receiver not only look alike but share the same life style and experiences. The shift can't help but be profound.

The second observation is almost as striking. Most teachers and ministers are women. At least in the United States that has probably been true for a long time but as there gets to be more subsidiarity in the exercise of authority and decision making becomes more collaborative, the fact that the vast majority of "church people" are feminine becomes increasingly significant.

The third observation may not have been quite so obvious but it seemed to me that, unlike the Council's, the face of the Congress was still predominately white and Anglo. There may be many good reasons why the minority groups that make up a larger and larger share of Catholics were not proportionately present but it looks as if the Church is largely seen and functions through the one predominant culture.

So much for the physical, external make-up of the Congress persons. Impressions of the changing idea of Church they harbored are much more personal and speculative but I hazard two.

The Church that was a matter of interest at the Congress was not so much a concept to be understood nor an institution to belong to or not but a reality to be experienced. Church "happens" sometimes more fully and vitally than others. Liturgy "works" in some parishes and not in others. The experts may be helpful to explain why it happens or how it can work better but these lay men and women didn't seem to need any help knowing what a worshipping, serving church is all about.

The qualities that seemed most sought after in the Church were those I see as feminine: community, compassion, nurturing, accepting. Let me be quick to add I don't see these as weak or undesirable. It does, however, make one ponder the now and future role of women in the Church.

Impressions undigested and unsorted, jotted down quickly as this newsletter goes to press. I would welcome comments and/or other reflections from the Congress. The theme of the weekend was, "Voices that Challenge." It is best if those voiced are here in the parish and are heard day after day.

In Christ,

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

**ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS**

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

April, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

This month's letter with its Easter message will arrive right in the midst of all the census material. The government is spending nearly three billion dollars, employing a host of workers and using the most advanced equipment to make this the most accurate count ever. The results will give not only the latest numbers but page after page of charts and graphs. All sorts of demographic, economic and sociological trends will be analyzed. When all is finished, probably no people will ever have been so completely and scientifically studied and described.

As important and even necessary as such an effort is, it seems to me that the message of Easter is precisely how limited and partial all such information is. It was during a census 2000 years ago that Jesus was born. Even the most sensitive social/political sensors picked up nothing special about the poor carpenter and his pregnant wife who came in from the hill country to be registered in Bethlehem. Thirty years later when the child, a country rabbi now, was executed as a common criminal no one saw the event as historically significant. Easter Sunday changed that forever.

On that day a few women and a handful of disciples came to realize that Jesus who had been dead was alive. His work which seemed to have ended in failure on Calvary was in fact triumphing. God who entered into history is not confined by it but acts in it freely according to his own designs.

As we fill out the forms, then, let us be thankful for Easter which guarantees that we are not statistics determined by a network of trends. Jesus, the one who counts most for us, won't be counted in the tally at all. His Spirit which moves where it wills figures in none of the predictions. Through the resurrection Jesus passed from the constrictions of time and space into a state of glory. By sharing in his risen life, we live in the here and now not determined by circumstances but open to a God who makes all things new, who can bring life out of death itself.

In Christ,



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

June, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

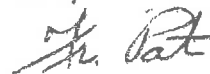
This is the month I leaped into the post-industrial age. The friendly Singer portable on which over the years I pecked out all my talks and letters is gone from beside my desk and in its place is a formidable looking brand new computer. From its mysterious, impersonal depths I am trying to extract this heart-to-heart sharing.

How do I feel face-to-face with this space-age marvel? Resentful and intimidated, thank you. It seems to me the last really necessary breakthrough in communication technology was the ballpoint pen. Correcting can be messy and I've had a few whose spelling was a bit erratic but who was complaining that we had to come up with something new?

To make matters worse, everybody seems to know more about these things than I do. I'm not talking just about the real know-it-alls with their jargon about bytes and RAM and PC-Run but about innocent looking second and third graders who have no awareness that a precomputer world existed and who take to the keyboard with the ease and naturalness that I put pen to paper.

Maybe, though, it's not really computers that are getting to me but change and newness. It's June and the end of a busy year. Maybe after the summer I'll be at ease and comfortable in front of the screen. Maybe it's like the Mass in English or receiving from the cup or seeing women about the altar - it just takes time getting used to.

In Christ,



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

July, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Last month I wrote about my own personal love/hate affair with the computer. While that relationship continues its up and down course, one that will make much more difference to all of us is developing in the office next door between Judy, our secretary, and the parish machine. You have probably suspected something already from changes in the bulletin.

The fascination with computers is that all at once you can do things you never dreamed of or accomplish with the punch of a key what would have taken hours. The disadvantage is that nothing comes out that didn't in one way or another go in. Once our parish computer is set up we will be able to obtain and work on information as never before but right now we are faced with the problem of feeding into it the preliminary raw data.

Hence the enclosed form and the designation of July 15 as Parish Census Sunday. Please fill out the sheet as accurately and completely as you can. Once completed, it can be returned to the parish office or brought with you to any of the Masses on the 15th. That Sunday in church people who did not receive a mailing or did not yet fill out the form will have the opportunity to do so.

Thanks for your cooperation. Together we move ahead in the high-tech era.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to be the initials 'H. G.' or similar, written in dark ink.



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

September, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Heaven's never ending day is not, for me, one of its more attractive features and I never envy God his unchanging now. That our lives are filled with beginnings, that seasons come and go, that each year brings the expected sequence of feasts and annual events as well as a share of surprises, that some things change, grow old and pass away seems to me to be a cause for wonder and gratitude.

The end of summer vacation and the September start-up of school is a good time to reflect on the importance of beginnings, the security of the expected and the promise of the new. In the parish so much will go on as usual. As the faithful have for centuries we meet each Sunday around the Lord's table. All the same sacraments, many of the same devotions, some of the same ministries that nourished our parents and grandparents will be there for us. Christmas, Easter, the festival, all the familiar feasts and events will be coming around again. There is a comforting sameness we can look forward to. Even some old familiar problems will not have gone away. But there will be changes, too: baptisms and funerals, weddings and marriages breaking up, people moving in and old-timers moving away. New programs will start up and old ones will have run their course. We can count on some successes but know there will be failures too. The old and the new, the lasting and the changing, winning some and losing some, all have their place.

When I was in school work, I was always amazed at the enthusiasm and freshness with which the young began each day or each year. I hope the parish, refreshed and renewed by the days of summer, takes up again with like enthusiasm and freshness our task "ever ancient, ever new" - living out more fully as a community the presence of Jesus in our midst.

Sincerely,



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

October, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Many, many years ago, in a former life, I was the principal of a boys high school. In that school, much of the counselling service was handled by the gym maintenance man. As with so much that went on in the school, this was not because of any decision or planning on my part. As a matter of fact, under my careful nurturing, the regular counselling department expanded mightily, dividing into personal, vocational and scholastic categories, each with pressing needs for qualified personnel, office space, secretarial services and costly materials. With no special training and not so much as a desk to sit behind, the custodian was a big-hearted Irishman who loved the kids and had won their trust. As a result, decisions ranging from where to go to college to how to make up with a fickle girlfriend were as often as not worked out with his sage and sympathetic advice.

That experience of the limits of management comes to mind this month when the full array of parish ministries and programs is revved up and back in full swing again. On the part of the staff and others, a serious effort has been made to discover and respond to everybody's needs and aspirations. Like to like groups, enrichment opportunities, prayer experiences and a wide range of services are operating and available. With so much going on, it is both humbling and comforting to know we haven't exhausted nor contained the working of the Holy Spirit. Individuals not on any committee are visiting the sick, sharing their faith, and being good neighbors. Couples too busy to attend any meetings are trying to pass on the faith to children or keep the faith with ailing parents. Men and women not "active in the parish" may yet be actively promoting God's kingdom by prayer, good works and good example.

The genial janitor dispensing wisdom in the locker room didn't dispense with the need for a counselling program but he did keep it aware it had no monopoly on answers. The Holy Spirit at work beyond all our programs and structures doesn't make them any less valuable but should keep us from pride and a sense of self-sufficiency. When we draw up the list of our committees, ministries, and services, we haven't got a full picture of what the Holy Spirit is up to nor does the success or failure of our programs tell us necessarily how the Kingdom is faring in the valley.

In Christ,



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

November, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Back in 1945 when I signed on with the Augustinians the life expectancy of American Augustinian priests was 57 years. I don't remember how I came to know that and I am not even absolutely sure the information was accurate. What I do remember is that the knowledge filled me with the same anxious dread I experienced in physics class finding out that the sun, squandering energy at the present rate, will be dark and cold in a mere six billion years or so. For a teenager, 40 years is an unimaginable duration.

When we are young, death is a total stranger and life is taken for granted. That attitude may be appropriate for children but we live in a society that tries to perpetuate it. People die not at home surrounded by family but hidden away in hospitals or old people's homes. Actually, nobody dies at all; they "pass away" or are "deceased." Here in California the trees and the flowers never go dormant but seem to be perpetually in bloom. A frantic effort to continue looking and acting young pretends we too can stay forever in full vigor and denies the body's inevitable slow-down and full stop.

Now that the Estimated Time of Departure has passed and I have outlived predictions of my own demise, there is a realistic awareness of mortality. I know that I have spent more time than I have left and my birthday, receding further and further into the past, commands less consideration than the approaching last day. I don't find this morbid or depressing. From all I believe, it is a wonderful place where I am heading. Both parents and many good friends are dead so I won't be alone when I get there.

November is a time to remember that paradoxically death is a fact of life. It reminds us that we are just one part of a Church which includes Suffering and Triumphant parts as well. It is a time to remember that this tangible, visible here and now we experience so forcefully is only a small fraction of a reality immensely larger and more lasting. It is a humbling month but one full of hope.

In Christ,



P.S. If in this mailing you receive a census form, it means that we have as yet not received yours. Please fill in and return so that our file may be complete.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUGUSTINIAN FATHERS

185 St. Thomas Drive  
OJAI, CALIFORNIA 93023

December, 1990

Dear Members of St. Thomas Parish,

Poor people spend a good part of their lives waiting. Early any morning you can see some of them lined up on Ojai avenue waiting for somebody to come along with an offer of work. They wait for buses, wait for treatment in health care clinics, wait for benefits or documents in government offices. The poor have no delusions about being in control of their lives.

The rich on the other hand have secretaries, appointment calendars, chauffeurs and Rolex watches all getting them without a second lost from one momentous appointment to another. Nothing so marks one off as a person of consequence as not to be kept waiting. That may be why we are so impatient. Waiting calls into question our importance.

In Advent we enter into the most profound kind of poverty and expectation - that of a creature before God. The world can do nothing to make its savior come nor to hurry his arrival. When he does appear, it is as a poor child recognized by poor shepherds. We are ready for the coming of Christ only if we too are poor in spirit, waiting to be made rich in him.

In Christ,

