



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS
CATHOLIC CHURCH • BARTOW, FL
DIOCESE OF ORLANDO

ST. THOMAS ANNOUNCEMENTS

April 21, 2024

1. **PLEASE CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR PEACE IN THE UKRAINE AND ISRAEL.**
2. **Pilgrimage to Italy August 12 – 25.** For information on the trip, go to St. Thomas website homepage and click on the button “Fr. Eugene’s Pilgrimages”. It will take you right to the information. For prices, click on the dates August 12-25, and the city you want to depart from. Father is leaving from Tampa.
3. **Pilgrimage to Greece September 17 – 30** with Fr. George Dunne, SSS, sponsored by San Pedro Spiritual Development Center. Includes 4-night cruise and roundtrip airfare from Orlando. For information <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bfc3028b98a787cb513d4ab/t/65b7bdbc63af444745dd97ab/1706540511009/Greece+Brochure+FINAL.pdf>. You may need to copy & paste the address if clicking on the link doesn’t take you there.
4. **Construction Volunteer Opportunities** to bring water to rural mountain communities to our Sister Diocese in San Juan de la Maguana in the Dominican Republic. May 4-11, June 22 – 29, July 20 – 27. For information, 407-246-4893 or zwamy.parra@orlandodiocese.org.
5. **The obligation to participate in the Eucharist in person on Sundays and other holy days of obligation was restored two years ago on Palm Sunday 2022.** Regular attendance at Mass is what fulfills God’s commandment to “Keep holy the Sabbath Day”. Our world is hurting. We all need healing yet many of us are separated from the source of our strength. Jesus Christ invites us to return to the source and summit of our faith: his Real Presence in the Eucharist.
6. Bishop Robert Barron has written a new book, *This is My Body: A Call to Eucharistic Revival*, to accompany the Eucharistic Revival currently underway in our country. Copies can be found in the narthex. Please take one and read it.
7. Our Parish bulletin can be viewed weekly online by clicking on the Bulletin button on our website at www.stthomasbartow.org. A new button has been added that you can also see the previous week’s bulletin. If you do not have access to the internet, please let the office know, and copies can be printed. If you look at the bulletin on your phone, you can add an icon to your homepage by doing the following steps

for an iPhone. 1. **Do a search for stthomasbartow.org.** 2. **When the page opens, Click** (touch) the small square with an arrow pointing up on the bottom of the screen. 3. **Scroll** down and (touch “Add to Home Screen”. 4. **Click** (touch) “Add” in the upper right-hand corner. The next time you want to view the website, you only have to touch the new icon on your home page screen. If you need help finding the website or creating the icon on your phone, call the office or stop in the narthex after Mass for help. If you have an Android phone, please call the office for directions.

8. **The Catechism in a Year Podcast is hosted by Fr. Mike Schmitz.** In these short podcasts, Fr. Mike will guide you through the entire Catechism of the Catholic Church in 365 episodes, providing explanation, insight, and encouragement along the way. Download your copy of the reading plan of *The Catechism in a Year* (with Fr. Mike Schmitz) at ascensionpress.com.
9. To subscribe to Bishop John Noonan’s E-Scroll, news from the Diocese of Orlando go to www.orlandodiocese.org/e-scroll/. Just provide your name and email address.
10. Fr. Blake Britton, a priest in our Diocese, who is now at the Pontifical Institute of St. John Paul II in Washington DC for further studies, has written a book, *Reclaiming Vatican II, What It (Really) Said, What It Means, and How It Calls Us to Renew the Church*. If you would like to purchase the book, click on the following link: <https://books.wordonfire.org/reclaimingvaticanii>
11. Bishop Robert Barron, author, speaker, theologian and founder of Word on Fire, a global media ministry, is producing a Bible series. Volume I focuses on the Gospels, Volume II on Acts, Letters, and Revelation, and Volume III, The Pentateuch. All can be ordered at <https://wordonfire.org/bible>. There will be a total of seven volumes. If you would like to subscribe to Bishop Barron’s newsletter, go to <https://wordonfire.org/#newsletter> and just provide your email address.
12. In honor of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Mother Angelica, foundress of EWTN Catholic television network, please consider a gift of \$10, \$20 or \$25 per month or any amount you choose.
13. **National Eucharistic Congress 2024.** It was 1941 in St. Paul/Minneapolis when the Church in America last gathered for a National Eucharistic Congress. A National Eucharistic Congress is a gathering of the whole Church from across the nation. Eucharistic Adoration is a powerful part of every Eucharistic Congress. At the 10th National Eucharistic Congress, our Catholic family will gather to experience profound, personal renewal through the power of Christ’s love. Reserve your passes today for the long-awaited 10th National Eucharistic Congress July 17 – 21 in Indianapolis, where the Church will find and renewal through a profound encounter with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.
14. **Ave Maria University upcoming Conferences.** Mary, Mother of the Eucharist May 10 – 12 and Called, Youth Conference July 12 – 14. For more information go to avemariaconferences.com.

“In God’s Vineyard all over the World”

St John Paul II in a book *Gift and Mystery* wrote for the 50th anniversary of his priestly vocation celebrated in Rome: “The priesthood is first a gift and a mystery that a man receives, You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go...” It is a gift of God to the Church as a whole and to a man in particular. As such, it is something that immediately evokes our gratitude. And this is what I want to do, to give thanks to God for 45 years of my priesthood. It was on April 21st 1979 in the basilica of St. Hedwig in Trzebnica when the bishop anointed my hands and laid his hands on my head. Like nothing happened, nothing changed to be noticed or seen by eyes, but from that very moment, I became a priest in Christ’s Holy Church. The next day I could take a host, say over it the words of consecration, and it changed into Christ’s Body; take the chalice filled with wine, say the words of consecration, and it changed into Christ’s Blood. How could this be possible? Yesterday I was the same man like I am today but I couldn’t do it yesterday. I didn’t notice any change in myself, didn’t feel any touch by the Holy Spirit, no fire tongs like in the Upper Room on the Pentecost, but so much changed. What a mystery! I had an inner feeling, that, in this very moment, I was ready to go where I always wanted to be and hopefully die one day. To Africa – the first line of missionary work in the Church. A few months later I was on the plane heading toward the chosen homeland. The dreams came true or God’s plan was unfolding? We never know at the beginning, but they were the happiest days in my life. Little did I know that it would last 29 years.

My bones weakened by countless malaria and tropical ulcers demanded a change of diet and climate. I knew I would have to return home. Not all of my fellow missionaries could. Some will stay to the day of universal resurrection. There were sad moments which are unfortunately part of our life.

But why I was there was for God, His Church and the Gospel. And the church was booming with many children from large families. Strong faith built on sound catechism teaching was accepted fully. Dedication and sacrifices were made

for God and His Church. Sunday was honored as the Lord's Day. It was a bright future for the world; an emerging new civilization built on sound foundations was ready to replace the sick Western one which is destroying more and more nations. It was time well spent.

Going home was going to a different world. So many changes occurred in the late 70's and 80's. Europe was different and the people were different. It was a different world than 30 years ago. And my mom wasn't there waiting for me anymore. Her name I found engraved in the marble block over her grave with the years of her birth and death.

At that time bishop Thomas Wenski was touring Poland, his parents' country of origin. But his visit had more to it than to admire the beauty of the Blessed Mother's beloved country. His main goal was to get some priests to work in Orlando Diocese. Our families don't give priests to the Church anymore; we have to travel the world and beg for some here and there, he was said.

I was approached by my superiors requesting me to go to Florida. Never before did I say no, to them, and I didn't want to say it now. But it was only a few months since I stepped back on home soil. Was this a test to the words I wrote as a motto for my priestly life on my ordination remembrance card: "In God's vineyard all over the world"? For now, I was going to test the most sophisticated, complex and difficult immigration process in the world.

The papers arrived. I had to go. In five weeks, it will be 15 years since I stepped on this land. The first two years I spent in St. Theresa Parish in Titusville on the East coast watching the last Challengers taking off and landing in Kennedy Space Center. In the meantime, there was a change in the Diocese leadership. Bishop Wenski went to Miami and Bishop John Noonan came to Orlando. When the former pastor of St. Thomas, Fr. Peter Mitchell, retired, Bishop Noonan asked me to go to Bartow, which you see I did. On August 15th, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the afternoon hours it will be thirteen years since my arrival here. So, we are almost up to date with my curriculum vitae.

Now, looking back, I'm extremely pleased and thankful to God for the call to priesthood and religious life. I did and always will consider it the greatest gift in my life. Today I encourage young men to go this way, to accept God's calling and say Yes. You will never regret it. Because priests have the privilege of holding God of creation in their hands. Without priests, there is no Eucharist. Without the Eucharist, there is no Church. And without the Church as a living, organized and worshiping community, there is no presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

The keys to finding one's vocation and purpose in life, in general, are silence and prayer, which make room for God's voice. Time for silence and prayer should be a daily practice for all of us – but especially for anyone seeking God's will for his or her own life. Only then will you hear His voice. And if God tells you to do something, do it. Don't argue. Obeying is the key. If you obey Him you will never lose. Like Abraham whose life was presented to us during the Lent Mass readings.

Is there anything I would like to change, do differently in my life looking into the past? Of course there is, but only the cosmetic changes, like study more, pray more, try in the years of formation to be more spiritual, better prepared for pastoral work. These kinds of values are the most precious ones, which last forever and benefit a person all his life. But I would say again "Yes" to God if called to his service again. Don't regret the time, even if not all the days are sunny, but God never promised a walk in rose gardens.

During the Mass I thank God for the priesthood, the most precious gift God could give to a human. I thank Him for his trust in me, for forgiveness, and most of all for showing me his love every day and for meeting so many wonderful people.

There will come the day to meet the giver of this gift face to face and I hope and pray and ask you to pray that He will welcome me to his Kingdom to spend all eternity with the Highest Priest, King of the Universe who trusted me for 45 years to hold Him in my hands

-Fr. Eugene Grytner