



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

ST. THOMAS ANNOUNCEMENTS

May 12, 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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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/](http://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 100<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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.** Called, Youth Conference July 12 – 14. For more information go to [avemariaconferences.com](http://avemariaconferences.com).

## Catholic Trivia

**Laura's Story\*** When I found out I was pregnant, it wasn't a joyous occasion for me. I was scared to have the baby and scared not to have the baby. If you had asked me a couple of years ago if I was pro-life, I would have said, "Sure." But when you find yourself in a situation where you could possibly lose your house, lose the ability to feed the three children that you already have — now all of a sudden, your morals are really put into question.

But I knew if I didn't have the baby, I'd be left with shame and regret for the rest of my life. I have had an abortion before; it's not something I'm proud of. I would often cry about the baby that I lost. I think it was probably out of guilt that I got pregnant again. I was hoping my boyfriend would be happy, because he had told me that he wished we had kept the other baby. But there was also a lot of shame in having a baby, too. I was afraid of how the community would view me.

I asked my boyfriend, "What do you want me to do?" And he kept saying, "It's your choice." It just didn't seem fair. [It was our baby,] but now it was all on my shoulders. I think what I really wanted to hear was, "I'll be with you every step of the way, no matter what!" I felt that there was no good option, and I didn't know what to do. So, I made an appointment at the abortion clinic. I begged them to let me take the abortion pills home because I wasn't 100% sure what I was going to do. I put them in the cupboard, and I would take them out and look at them. I even took them out of the package, and I held them in my hand. But I just couldn't do it.

I reached out to an online group called "I Regret my Abortion." A man connected me with the Sisters of Life, who offered that support that I had been looking for. They called me every other day when I was scared and trying to make up my mind. They kept pouring life into me and saying, "You can do this." But I wanted to know how, because on paper there was no way I was going to be able to afford to have a baby. They just said, "We can't tell you how — but we know that God provides."

I took a leap of faith and destroyed the abortion pills. I said, "Welcome to the world, little one. I don't know how I'm going to feed you; I don't know how I'm going to keep my house, but God does, and that's all I need to know." But in other moments I would think, "What did I just do? I just flushed my life down the toilet." The anxiety was paralyzing. I still had bills to pay. I was still working 60 hours a week at a factory. One day, when I was really struggling, I told the Sisters that it was my dream to get out of the factory. It was physically taxing. The Sisters encouraged me to go back to school, so I applied. I just wanted to see if I would get in; I never thought I'd actually go. It seemed impossible with a baby on the way. Although I was accepted into the program, I continued working at the factory. When September rolled around, I could no longer stand for a 12-hour shift, and so my doctor qualified me for short-term disability. That

freed up the time for me to start school. While waiting for my first disability paycheck, I received a scholarship grant just when I needed it. The timing was amazing. I completed my first semester, and then gave birth during my Christmas break.

I never would have thought in a million years that things would just fall into place for me like that. I had to get the brakes done on my van, and miraculously I got the exact cost sent to me from a government grant. I was worried that I didn't have enough baby things. But when the Sisters came to visit me, they had the whole room full of gifts for me and the baby. I was bawling when I saw it. The Catholic ladies in my town did a diaper shower. They figured out how many diapers a child would need from birth and gave them all to me. The community here has really stepped up in so many ways. There is a woman who would come over and just hold my baby so I could do my school work.

My friend, the one who reached out to me online, was inspired to send me a Bible passage from Hosea: "I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope" (*Hos 2:14-15*). That same day, I was speaking to Sr. Mary Grace on the phone, and when I read it out loud there was dead silence, and then Sister said, "That is the Scripture I was praying with this morning."

I always believed God existed, but I never felt His presence until things like this started happening. I was raised going to Church, but I was lukewarm and just did my own thing. So, for Him to pour out grace on me ... Why? Why me? There are really good people out there who didn't mess up! But it's just nice to know even when you do mess up, He's still there; He still loves you. I know now that nothing I can do will make Him love me more or less.

If you had asked me last year to write the script of how my year was going to go, I never would have imagined that it would go like this. How does a single woman with three kids at home doing online school recover from a C-section, go to school full-time, and make the Dean's Honor Roll? I can't even tell you how! It's God — that's it. He's all-powerful, and He has provided for me. So lately, I have found myself reaching out to other women online who are in the position I was in. I feel privileged to walk beside them.

I don't know what the future holds for me. I look at my smiling girl, and I can't imagine life without her. I know that she was meant to be here. God had poured out so many blessings on me because I took that leap of faith. It has inspired me to keep taking leaps of faith.

*\* Name changed for anonymity*