

Bishop Felipe J. Estévez' Homily for the Vietnamese Community
On the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Christ the King Parish, Jacksonville
October 20, 2013

One of the most impressive witnesses of the power of prayer was the gentle Vietnamese hero, Cardinal Francis Xavier Van Thuan, Archbishop of Saigon, imprisoned for 13 years, released and exiled in Italy. John Paul II assigned him to lead the Justice and Peace Commission and now just a few weeks ago Pope Francis celebrated the progress of his beatification.

Benedict XVI, in his 2007 encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, references Cardinal Van Thuan twice.

“A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me anymore, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me [25]. When I have been plunged into complete solitude ...if I pray, I am never totally alone.

“The late Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, a prisoner for thirteen years, nine of them spent in solitary confinement, has left us a precious little book: *Prayers of Hope*. During thirteen years in jail, in a situation of seemingly utter hopelessness, the fact that he could listen and speak to God became for him an increasing power of hope, which enabled him, after his release, to become for people all over the world a witness to hope-to that great hope which does not wane even in the nights of solitude.” (32)

Pray in community

Today the Lord encourages us to pray more often. Pray with deeper trust. We all know the axiom “the family that prays together stays together.” We need to dedicate times of prayer in the family especially by attending Sunday Mass as a family. What a striking image we have today; Moses calls Aaron and Hur to pray with him as Joshua fights against Amalek. As long as they are praying they overcome the enemy, when they put down their hands they begin to lose. This is the way Scripture tells us prayer powerful and aids us in our victory over evil. The Spanish word “Palanca” – is used by the Cursillo Movement. Palanca is when someone goes on a Cursillo retreat, his friends, his family offer sacrifices and prayers on his or her behalf. Each member of the family needs to provide Palanca for others in the family.

Praying the Scriptures

Today, St. Paul tells Timothy: “Holy Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction and for training and righteousness... so that one who belongs to God may be competent and equipped for good work.”

For some the Scriptures can be intimidating – we are afraid and think that we cannot understand them but we should not be afraid. Let each one have a Bible at home and open it. I am very impressed with the students at the University of Florida – the Catholic Gators – who pray the Book of Psalms daily, a great witness of our youth that they pray from the Bible. St. Jerome

said that to ignore the Scriptures is to ignore Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ is sown in the Scriptures.

St. Luke tells us twice that Mary kept the Word in her heart. The late Bishop Agustin Roman of Miami would say that Mary's heart is a Bible because she kept the word in her heart, meditating, remembering the divine acts of her son. I encourage you to support Bible courses. I encourage you to learn *lectio divina* – read, meditate, pray and contemplate the Word of God as it is found in the Scriptures.

Pray Always

St. Matthew 7, says ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. God is so generous that he will respond to our prayers and petitions. Today the Gospel shows us how an evil judge will deliver because it is pressed by someone but God in turn is so generous he rejoices in granting abundantly what we asks of him, for our good, the good our family.

The late Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, in his book of spiritual exercises, tells us that during his life there were long periods when he was unable to pray and that he would hold fast to the texts of the Church's prayer: the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the prayers of the liturgy [27], Pope Benedict in his encyclical, *Spe Salvi*.

Praying must always involve an intermingling of public and personal prayer. This is how we can speak to God and how God speaks to us. In this way we undergo those purifications by which we become open to God and are prepared for the service of our fellow human beings. We become capable of the great hope, and thus we become ministers of hope for others. Hope in a Christian sense is always *m e a n s* hope for others as well. It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the "perverse end." It is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God. Only in this way does it continue to be a truly human hope.

We are so blessed that Cardinal Van Thuan left us 10 rules for our spiritual life, I hope that every Vietnamese family would make these rules visible in their homes for all members to remember each day:

1. I will live the present moment to the fullest.
2. I will discern between God and God's works.
3. I will hold firmly to one secret: prayer.
4. I will see in the Holy Eucharist my only power.
5. I will have only one wisdom: the science of the Cross.
6. I will remain faithful to my mission in the Church and for the Church as a witness of Jesus Christ.
7. I will seek the peace the world cannot give.
8. I will carry out a revolution by renewal in the Holy Spirit
9. I will speak on language and wear one uniform: Charity
10. I will have one very special love: The Blessed Virgin Mary