
IN MEMORY OF THE CARDINAL

FRANCIS XAVIER NGUYỄN VAN THUÂN

“Let us now sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations.
The Lord apportioned to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning.
There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name
for themselves by their valour;
Those who gave counsel, because they were intelligent; those who spoke in prophetic oracles;
Those who led the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of the people’s lore;
They were wise in their words of instruction;
These (also) were godly men, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten” (Sirach.44:1-10).

It is certainly a great joy and a cherished honour for the *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace* to not only celebrate the memory of the Cardinal Francis Nguyen Van Thuân, but to promote this celebration in the universal Church, even to the point of converting the celebration of the Cardinal’s memory into incessant prayer and intercession for the grace and privilege of his *beatification*. Thus, not only does this *Pontifical Council* rejoice to sing *his praise as a famous ancestor in the faith*. It also acknowledges *his godliness and righteous deeds*, and wishes not only to save them from oblivion, but to recall them in the *assembly of God’s faithful* for the praise of God and for the edification of his Church. The celebration today of the *Solemn Opening of the Cause for his Beatification* is a sign of all this; and we commend it to your prayers!

Indeed, it is this *Solemn Opening of the Cause of Beatification of Cardinal van Thuân* that has brought us all together here in Rome from the various parts of the world. We thank you all for having graciously accepted our invitation to come. Very many of you have come here because you knew Cardinal Van Thuân personally and did benefit from his priestly and Episcopal ministry. Others are here because they have been touched by his great witness of *faith, persevering hope and edifying charity* in his writings; and still others are here because they have already experienced God’s grace and favour through their invocation of the intercession of the *servant of God*; so that you have found it propitious even to make him the patron of various social ministries in parishes and Dioceses. May God continue to bless you all at the intercession of his servant, Cardinal van Thuân!

As divine providence had it, the celebration of the Assumption of Mary on that fateful day: 15th August 1975, also signaled a radical change in the life and ministry of Archbishop Van Thuân. As in the Scriptures, where the change of cloth of people signified a change in their status, the Archbishop’s change of dress, albeit imposed, would signify a change of state: a change in his life and ministry. Deprived of all Episcopal titles, appellations and insignia, and reduced to cladding himself in a simple black cassock, the Archbishop would have prison cells as his parish and prisoners as his congregation. Reduced to a prisoner among prisoners, Archbishop Van Thuân would witness to and celebrate the presence of the Lord and God of his faith and religion among prisoners. But this *kenotic* experience, in imitation of the Lord, who emptied himself and took the form of a slave, so that he might live among us, was to be the Cardinal’s *school of persevering faith and enduring hope*.

From here, Cardinal van Thuân would emerge a heroic witness of the sustaining power of the Eucharist, a witness of the comforting presence of Mary, the witness of a strong faith in God, of a self-sacrificing love and a persevering hope in adversity. Thus, the servant of God, whose memory we celebrate in this gathering, would travel the world as an apostles of Christian hope: "*that great hope which does not wane even in the nights of solitude*" (Benedict XVI). He would give rich testimonies of this in a retreat to the papal household and the Roman Curia in the days of Pope John Paul II; and Pope Benedict XVI would refer to the Cardinal's *prayers of hope* in his own reflection on the Christian virtue in his encyclical, *Spe Salvi*.

*May the recognition of the great spiritual stature of this servant of God by the Pontiffs, and all the prayers of God's people avail unto his **beatification**. May God grant us the grace of seeing him soon elevated to the altar!*

Amen.

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