

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2022 C

Does the name Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan ring a bell? Those of really robust memory might recall that I mentioned him last year, a Cardinal of the Church who served as the archbishop of Saigon. He was arrested in 1975 by the Communist government in Vietnam and then spent the next 13 years in prison, nine of those years in solitary confinement. Needless to say, his faith and trust in God was tested far beyond what most of us will ever experience. He wrote: *“seeing only two guards every day, enduring mental torture, absolute emptiness, with no work to do, having to walk back and forth in my cramped cell from morning to night so that I would not become crippled by arthritis. I was on the brink of insanity.”*

And that was of course the intention of his captors, to break his mind and spirit. But what sustained him in all those years was trust in God, prayer, and above all, the living presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Friends smuggled in wine labeled as “stomach medicine” and hosts sealed in a flashlight. His chalice was the palm of his hand, with three drops of wine and one drop of water, and his memory served as his Missal. He reserved a consecrated Host in a kind of a portable tabernacle, made out of a cigarette package. As he put it: *“Jesus in the Eucharist was always with me in my shirt pocket.”* Later, in a concentration camp with other prisoners, this little container that held the Eucharist was passed around secretly; he writes: *“they all knew that Jesus was among them, He who could heal all their physical and mental suffering. Jesus helped us in a tremendous way with His silent presence. The darkness of prison became light; the seed of faith germinated underground during that storm.*

The seed of faith germinated underground. That is after all where seeds begin to sprout, putting down roots and reaching upwards to light. Growth starts even before we are aware of it. Jeremiah too speaks of the roots that reach out to the stream ... it is what is below the surface, in our hearts and spirits, that finds

strength and life, even while our outer struggles continue. Paul reminds us of the hope that goes beyond this life. He does not trivialize our real sufferings here and now, but assures us that as real as they are, they will not have the last word, for Christian faith does not end in emptiness or defeat, but in life and joy.

Hidden in the darkness of the tomb, unseen by anyone, new life came forth with the Resurrection; Jesus rose from death before anyone was aware of it. Suffering, sorrow, and death planted roots into the heart of God's mercy, and the stone was rolled away so Life could emerge into the world ... a life that has never left us and never been defeated.

Jesus' own words in the Beatitudes admit the reality of what is, but hold out the assurance of what will one day be. Our past is not our future, our pain at present will yield to healing, our sorrowing will be consoled. As Pope Benedict wrote almost 50 years ago, the true form of Christian faith is not so much about *concepts* ... that I believe THAT this or that doctrine or teaching is true ... but about *trust*, saying, I know You and so I believe You, Jesus, even if right now trust is tested by suffering.

Trust can be fragile, and it is sorely tested in many directions today. ***But the Host you will receive in a few minutes is also fragile, easily broken.*** This is the form Jesus chooses to bring God's mercy into our lives, into our world ... He takes our wounded human nature, blesses it with His love, breaks it in the mystery of His death, and through His resurrection gives us new life and hope. We can trust Him, not to take away the Cross, but to draw us into the pattern of His death, so that our very sufferings and sorrows become a way to draw closer to God's mercy. Like Cardinal van Nguyen, may we recognize Him in the breaking of bread, and receive Him with our *Amen*, a word we want to say with this precise meaning today: "Jesus, I trust in You."