

well as mental. There were moments when I could not concentrate at all, when I could not even pray. Jesus then sent me light. "I must live the testament of Christ" - In his testament, just before dying, Jesus left me his word, his body, his mother, his Church, his priesthood, his new commandment, his mission, the duty to make all things one. Several times a day, I repeated to myself, "I must live the testament of Christ" - It's simple, it's inexhaustible. I will try to explain how I received the strength of God's liberating power by **citing 10 rules**.

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 one language and wear one uniform: Charity
10. I will have one very special love: The Blessed Virgin Mary

In a situation of seemingly utter hopelessness, the fact that Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan 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.

*"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."*

Socials with the Saints

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Sources include: www.nguyenvanthuan.com www.michaeljournal.org/articles/roman-catholic-church/item/a-beaming-witness-to-hope-the-late-cardinal-nguyen-van-thuan ,
www.aletia.org

Venerable Nguyen Van Thuan ***Cardinal, Prisoner***

Born: April 17, 1928

Died: September 22, 2002

Buried: Santa Maria della Scala, Rome, Italy

Priesthood. Ordained, June 11, 1953, Huê.
Pastoral work, 1953-1955.

Cardinal: The pectoral cross that he wore until his death was one that he made with two small pieces of wood when he was in jail; he protected the cross hiding it in a piece of soap so that his jailers would not confiscate it; when he was freed, he covered the wooden cross with a coat of metal.

Patronage: Prisoners, Obedience, Trust, Perseverance



Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan was born on April 17, 1928, near Hue, the former capital of Annam. His father's and mother's families were not of the same social status — businessmen and merchants on his father's side, high-ranking mandarins on his mother's side. But for generations, members of both families had distinguished themselves for their Catholic faith and love of country. Many had been martyred. For more than two centuries, in fact, between 1644 and 1888, waves of violent persecutions had martyred about 150,000. These memories remained vivid in both families, sustaining their faith.

Thuan was particularly proud of his mother's family. Ngo Dinh Kha, his mother's father, had been one of the few Catholics to hold an important post in the Imperial Court in Vietnam. He had six sons and three daughters, to whom he passed on his life's passion: "God desires Vietnam's independence." His daughter Hiep (Elizabeth, born in 1903, who would become Thuan's mother) helped keep the Ngo Dinh family united in faith and in their desire to help Vietnam achieve independence. In 1955, Diem, Kha's third son, would become the President of the new Republic of Vietnam.

Nguyen Van Am and Hiep, his wife, married in 1924, had already been tried by the illness and death of their eldest son, Xuan. Hiep named her second son — who would be followed by seven other children — "Thuan" ("Will of God"). Thuan had a happy childhood. At the age of

13, Thuan asked his parents for permission to continue his studies at the minor seminary in An Ninh, where his uncle Thuc, who had become a priest, then a bishop, had been trained. At An Ninh, a center of Catholic resistance against persecutions, the portrait of Ngo Dinh Kha was displayed with reverence. The seminary was run by the Fathers of the Foreign Missions of Paris, whose numbers included several Vietnamese priests. These professors sowed in Thuan's soul the seeds of a true devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and gave him sure teachers — the Curé d'Ars, Therese of Lisieux, and Francis Xavier, his patron saint.

World War II, France's defeat, and Japan's temporary victory, all came unexpectedly. Thuan was more interested in reading the lives of the saints — particularly that of Theophane Venard — and praying the Rosary. Every morning, he went to Mass and received Communion.

In March 1945, Japan took control of Vietnam. But several days after this sudden show of force, the residents of Hue saw red flags waving throughout the city — the first sign of the Communist "liberation front". Ngo Dinh Khoi, the eldest of Thuan's uncles and a declared enemy of the Communists, was arrested on August 31 and executed by them a few weeks later with his only son, as a traitor to his country. Thuan was overcome with fury — forgiveness seemed impossible to him. He felt the same anguish again in 1963-64, when killings and executions annihilated his family, and again in 1975, at the beginning of his imprisonment.

Learning to master his anger would be a long and difficult process for him. In contemplating the example of Jesus Christ, he understood that loving those who committed cruel offenses against him is not optional, yet his heart remained closed to all forgiveness. Providence then brought to his attention the example of Father Pro, a Mexican Jesuit who was arrested and executed in November 1927 by his country's Communist government, and who died forgiving his executioners. In the fall of 1947, Thuan entered the major seminary in Phu Xuan.

He fed himself on Saint Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, as well as Father Garrigou-Lagrange's masterpiece, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*. At this time, he also came to know *The Imitation of Christ* and *The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, works to which he would remain devoted for the rest of his life.

On June 11, 1953, Thuan was ordained a priest by Bishop Urrutia in Hue. Three months later, he was diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis. He was

rushed to the main hospital in Hue. At their son's bedside, Thuan's parents spent hours praying the Rosary with him. Transferred to Saigon, he was admitted to the French military hospital in April 1954. The doctors decided to remove a lung. The morning scheduled for the operation, during the last X-ray before administering general anesthesia — amazement! No trace of tuberculosis! "It's a miracle!" Thuan joyously exclaimed. Four days later, in perfect health he returned to Hue. At the same time, the radio announced the fall of Dien Bien Phu.

In July, in spite of protests by the new government's leader Ngo Dinh Diem, the Geneva Accords were signed, and the country was divided in two. The Communists controlled the North. In October 1955, the South was declared a Republic, with Diem as its first president.

Almost a million North Vietnamese, many of them Catholic, fled to the South. It was at this time that Thuan's bishop sent him to Rome, where he spent four years studying at the College for the Propagation of the Faith. During his vacations he traveled throughout Europe. In August 1957, in front of the Grotto in Lourdes, he whispered, not entirely aware of what he was saying, "In the name of Your Son and in your name, Mary, I accept any trials or suffering..." He returned to Vietnam in 1959.

The following year, John XXIII established a Vietnamese ecclesial hierarchy. At the same time, the faculty board elected Thuan the head of the minor seminary. Three years later, on November 1, 1963, a group of generals launched a coup. Diem refused to use the presidential guard and tried to negotiate. It was a failure. The next day, November 2, on his way to Mass and confession, he was assassinated with his brother Nhu.

Six months later, Can, Diem's brother, fell into the hands of rebel generals; he was executed on May 8, 1964. Thuan was living a nightmare — four uncles murdered, two others in exile, his parents' health ruined, Vietnam's independence in danger. But Providence came to his assistance—he was named Vicar General, a responsibility that took his mind off his troubles. In April 1967, Paul VI named him bishop of Nha Trang.

Located on the coast, about 250 miles from Saigon, the diocese of Nha Trang numbered 1,160,000 inhabitants at that time, among whom 130,000 were Catholics. Thuan was consecrated a bishop in Hue, on June 24th. In 1968, during the Viet Cong's "Tet Offensive", it became apparent that the Communists might gain control of South Vietnam, despite the

American presence. Bishop Thuan decided to step up, in addition to the formation of lay parishioners, pastoral care for vocations. In the space of eight years, the number of major seminarians in his diocese went from 42 to 147; the number of minor seminarians rose from 200 to 500.

In April 1975, the bishop ordained the last large class of seminarians, shortly before the Communists took control of Nha Trang. The diocese was strong enough to deal with the restrictions. One by one, the Viet Cong occupied the most important cities. Thousands of people headed South, with their sick and elderly. Bishop Thuan chartered planes to parachute tons of medicine and food to these needy refugees. In doing so, he attracted the Communists' hostility. He knew it, but he was doing his duty as a bishop.

On April 23, he learned that Pope VI had named him the Archbishop of Saigon's coadjutor (auxiliary with right to succession). Without dwelling on the dramatic consequences this decision would have for him, Bishop Thuan set off for the southern capital at the beginning of May.

On August 13, Bishop Thuan received an order to present himself to the former presidential palace where he was pressed to confess that he was the agent of a Vatican conspiracy. When he admitted nothing, he was put in a car and taken by night to a village near Nha Trang. There, he was placed under house arrest in the home of the parish priest and forbidden to communicate with anyone under threat of retaliation against the diocese. Soon, his inability to act for God and for souls began to make his bishop's heart suffer.

Reflecting on Saint Paul's captivity in Rome, he decided to write letters to the faithful. Thus, was born *The Road of Hope*. Printed anonymously, the work soon found its way into the hands of many faithful, even in France and the United States. Infuriated, the authorities transferred Bishop Thuan to the camp in Phu Khanh on March 19, 1976, the feast of Saint Joseph.

He was locked in a tiny windowless cell, filled with mold and fungus because of the dampness; there he stayed nine months without ever coming out, without meeting any fellow prisoners.

Bit by bit isolation did its work: "*Many confused feelings swam in my head,*" he would later write; "*sadness, fear, nervous tension. My heart was broken by the separation from my people. I was unable to sleep, tormented by the thought of all the works I had taken on for God going to*

ruin, and my being rebelled against it. One night, a voice said to me, in formation of lay parishioners, pastoral care for vocations. In the space of eight years, the number of major seminarians in his diocese went from 42 to 147; the number of minor seminarians rose from 200 to 500.

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On November 29, 1976, he was taken to a work camp in the mountains of North Vietnam. There he managed to have a Christian send him a little wine, disguised as a "remedy for stomachaches," and a few small fragments of bread hidden in a flashlight. He kept all this in a cardboard box. That box became his own private altar. Every day, at 3 pm, the hour of Christ's death, he would place drops of wine in the palm of his hand, mingled with water, to celebrate Mass."

He began celebrating Mass in secret. From then on, he continually experienced Christian joy. He gave communion to Catholics in prison with him. Through his openness and kindness, he gained accomplices even among his guards.

As a result, he was transferred to a stricter prison close to Hanoi. Through a security guard, he learned that John Paul II had received a request from the bishops of Vietnam for their country's martyrs to be canonized. This development made his release impossible, which had been foreseen at one time.

Van Thuan was finally released on November 21, 1988, and being allowed to visit Rome, was barred from ever returning to Vietnam. **Consequently, he spent the rest of his life in Rome and died on September 16, 2002.** His cause for canonization was initiated on October 22, 2010 and is continuing to progress with the declaration of his heroic virtues.

The decree of Pope Francis said about Van Thuan, *"This witness of faith, hope and charity of the Servant of God, given generously day after day with humility and discretion, is a constant invitation to collective holiness, which finds its greatest expression in fidelity to God and in his reciprocal help to travel the way of holiness."*

During those thirteen years I became aware of all my weaknesses, physical as

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