Corpus Christi B

June 3, 2018

St. Patrick

Cardinal Francis Xavier Van Thuan was born ninety years ago and, at his death in 2002, he served as head of the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice in Rome. In 1975, as the new Archbishop of Saigon, Cardinal Van Thuan was arrested and imprisoned in North Vietnam for thirteen years. For nine long years he was held in solitary confinement in prison. After his release and subsequent exile from Vietnam the Cardinal was often asked, “Were you able to celebrate Holy Mass (in prison)?” He said: “When I was arrested, I had to leave immediately with empty hands. The next day, I was permitted to write to my people in order to ask for the most necessary things like clothes, toothpaste and the like…I wrote, “Please send me a little wine as medicine for my stomach ache.” (1) His people got the message.

“They sent me a small bottle of wine for Mass with a label that read, ‘medicine for stomach aches.’ They also sent some hosts, which they hid in a flashlight for protection against the humidity.

“The police asked me, ‘You have stomach aches?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Here’s some medicine for you.’

“I will never be able to express my great joy! Every day, with three drops of wine and a drop of water in the palm of my hand, I would celebrate Mass. This was my altar, and this was my cathedral! It was true medicine for soul and body… Each time I celebrated Mass I had the opportunity to extend my hands and nail myself to the cross with Jesus, to drink with him the bitter chalice. Each day in reciting the words of consecration, I confirmed with all my heart and soul a new pact, an eternal pact between Jesus and me through his blood mixed with mine. Those were the most beautiful Masses of my life! So, for so many years I was nourished with the bread of life and the chalice of salvation.”

The Cardinal told how in the dark of night, when not in solitary confinement, he would distribute Communion to the Catholics who were with him in a common dormitory; and how he made a tabernacle out of a discarded cigarette pack and carried the sacrament with him. The Cardinal said, “The Eucharist became for me and other Christians a hidden and encouraging presence in the midst of all our difficulties….In this way, the darkness of the prison became a paschal light…”

Friends: As we heard Jesus say solemnly at the Last Supper, each time we celebrate the Eucharist we hear these very same words—**“This is my Body”** and then, **“This is my blood of the covenant”—**and we believe that, through the consecrating power of the Holy Spirit, the bread becomes the very Body of the Risen Christ, and the wine becomes the precious Blood of Christ. Yes, today is the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, and we humbly praise God and give glorious thanks that we are fed so richly as we make our journey together. But there’s so much more to this mystery! We remember and make present the one sacrifice of Christ for us, in which his loving death on the cross for us even today **“cleanse(s) our consciences from dead works to worship the living God”** (Hebrews 9:14). And yet, we have a part in that one sacrifice. As Cardinal Van Thuan put it, “Each time I celebrated Mass I had the opportunity to extend my hands and nail myself to the cross with Jesus, to drink with him the bitter chalice.” Each day we are called to live in a bold, conscious way—different from that of our culture in so many ways—and in so doing, likewise join ourselves to that one sacrifice of Christ when we gather every Sunday. Each time we gather for Mass, it’s such a wondrous mystery! May we join our lives to Christ’s, and truly show we are sharers in this new covenant of his blood!

1. Cardinal Francis Xavier Van Thuan, Testimony of Hope: The Spiritual Exercises of John Paul II (New York: Paulist Press), pages 131-32 for this and the following citations. This story was told by Archbishop Daniel Buechlein at a Mass on May 15, 2009, at St. Joseph Catholic Church, Madison, Tennessee.

***General Intercessions***

***Corpus Christi June 3, 2018***

**Grant that all in your Church may find a ready welcome and acceptance of their spiritual gifts in the one Body of Christ; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Strengthened by your flesh and blood, embolden your Church to stand with the lowly, the poor, immigrants and refugees; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Renew our families during these summer weeks, giving safety in travel, rest in our breaks from work, and joy in our prayer; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**By your redeeming love, direct nations—and all of us—to shun violence and live as true peacemakers; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Heal those who have suffered the trauma of abuse, bigotry, or violence; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Safeguard all runners, parish volunteers, and those who celebrate with us the 5-K run to benefit our St. Patrick Outreach Ministry; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Bring all those who have died to behold the glory of your face, especially as we pray for Mildred Alexander; we pray to you, O Lord—**