

# Spreading the Gospel in Vietnam

By Fr. Ezra Sullivan, OP



The Church in Vietnam is really thriving. What a joy to see after the empty churches of Europe or rather, the churches with many tourists but few worshippers.

The opportunity was a great blessing to my priesthood in many ways, and my superiors are also grateful. We Dominicans have a great tradition of mission work! For me it was particularly meaningful, because many of my brothers were martyred there in previous centuries, and because it came at the beginning of my time in Europe it will help to shape my perspective on the Universal Church.

For many, the word "Vietnam" might conjure up thoughts of a war in the 1970s, but for me the name is forever tied to Evangelization. Don Turbitt, Deacon Xavier Chau Doan and I comprised a three-man team that traveled to the diocese of Thanh Hoa to share the Gospel. For me, it was a particular

blessing to be with these experienced evangelizers. It was my first time in Vietnam and only my second time in Asia!

In Thanh Hoa we stayed in the minor seminary, which is also the residence of Bishop Joseph Linh; it is right across the street from the Cathedral. Only a block away is a large school and convent of sisters who belong to the congregation, The Lovers of the Cross. Beginning with the morning after we arrived, it was very apparent that the Gospel has put down strong roots in Vietnamese soil. Our job was not so much to plant new seeds, but rather to water the vine that is growing rapidly.

Part of our work was getting to know the seminarians and teaching them. Thanh Hoa has expanded its infrastructure since Renewal Ministries was there two years ago. The Cathedral now has a large outdoor piazza suitable for processions and outdoor masses to accommodate more than 2,500 people. More importantly, however, is the spirit in the seminary which is flourishing. Don taught about prayer and what it means to be a leader in the Church; Deacon Chau taught about Mary; I taught about the Church's commitment to truth. Once the 50 or so seminarians got used to us, they asked some very good questions about all sort of things. They even invited me to play soccer with them!

We also taught the sisters at their facility. They run a pre-school and early grade school, which has now become so well-respected that even governmental officials send their children there. It is a good way to indirectly evangelize. The children learn basic catechism and prayers. Teaching the 70 or so sisters was delightful. They were very attentive, full of questions, and ready to discuss our teachings. As with the seminarians, we encountered souls athirst for the "grace and knowledge of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pt 3:18).

In the evenings we held a preaching-praying service. Selecting topics relevant to a general congregation, we took turns on different nights preaching about the "New Evangelization," the



Above, Bishop Joseph Linh processed from the Thanh Hoe cathedral. Pictured left, our team prayed over this boy and his hands were miraculously healed from constant perspiration.

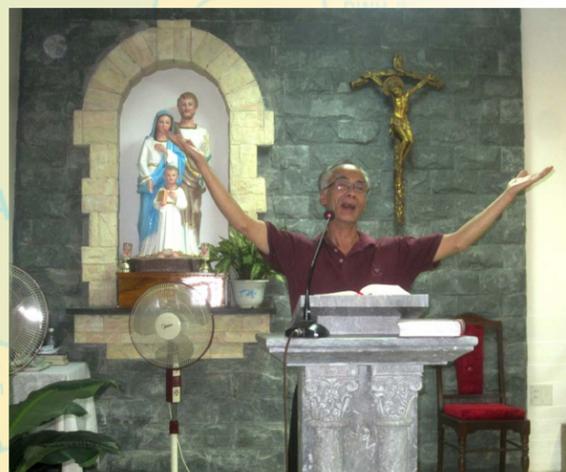


woman at the well, trust in God, and so on. After we preached, we prayed with the people. This is when a missionary sees the work of Holy Trinity in a more intimate way, because to petition God is to become vulnerable with Christ who was wounded to save us. We begged God for greater faith, greater love, greater hope in Him; we asked for healings; we pleaded for strength. And He heard us. ✝

## Editor's note:

Fr. Ezra Sullivan, OP, a young Dominican priest studying for his doctorate in Rome was part of a team that traveled to Vietnam recently under the leadership of our Country Coordinator, Don Turbitt and important team member, Deacon Chau Doan. Ralph Martin first met Fr. Ezra when he was completing his STL degree at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. They reconnected again when Ralph gave a parish mission at St. Gertrude's in Cincinnati, Ohio, where the Dominican novitiate is located. Fr. Ezra's report is below.

Fr. Ezra Sullivan, OP taught first year seminarians about angels, devils, heaven and hell.



Above, Dcn. Chau served as teacher and translator for this mission. At right, Fr. Ezra Sullivan, OP, Don Turbitt and Dcn. Chau were presented with exotic floral arrangements by the sisters of The Lovers of the Cross.

