



Words of Gratitude

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A period of 25 years is already a quarter of a human life; however, it is just a fraction in comparison with 785 years of the history of the Order of the Preachers. Nevertheless, a quarter of a century is long enough for us to pause and look back in order to embrace the future with renewed vision. As Charles Jefferson said: *"Gratitude is born in hearts that take time to count up past mercies"*, the Vietnamese Dominican Friars of St. Vincent Liem Vicariate in Calgary would like to take this opportunity to count up past mercies and grace. Our hearts are grateful to God, our benefactors, relatives, and our Dominican Brothers and Sisters all over the world.

God's Love: Forever We Sing

To God we always give thanks *"for he is good and his steadfast love endures for ever"* (Psa 118:1). No words of thanks are fitting enough to God since He is eternal and His love and goodness towards the Vicariate throughout the last 25 years have been so great and abundant. With human wisdom and effort alone the Vietnamese Dominican Vicariate would probably be long gone. God, who raised the dead, performed a similar miracle for the Vicariate during the first years the Friars gathered together in this city. You will see how anxious, disappointed, and at times despairing the first Friars were in the beginning years of the Vicariate's establishment through articles contained in this book, especially *"St. Vincent Liem Vicariate: A Brief History"* written by Fr. Paul Dzung Tran, the Vicar Provincial.

"God, you have no need of our prayer; yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift" (Sacramentary, Weekday's Preface IV). Yes, more than ever the Vietnamese Dominican Friars of St. Vincent Liem Vicariate have found the truth that *"praising God is itself His gift"*. We will *"forever sing of your love"* (Psa 89:1) since *"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High"* (Psa 92:1).

While celebrating this joyful occasion of the Vicariate's 25th Anniversary, the Vietnamese Dominican Friars want to follow the Apostles to *"devote ourselves to prayer"* (Acts 6:4a) because, prayer itself is a true way of thanking God as stated by Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P. the former Master of the Order: *"... prayer is simply the recognition of what things are. Everything is a gift. To ask God for what I desire and to thank God when I receive it is living in the real world. It is opening our eyes to the pure gratuity of being. The word 'thank' derives from*

'think'. Thanking is thinking truly and prayer helps us to think well" (What is the Point of Being a Christian?, London: Burns & Coates, 2006, p. 127).

Pioneering Work: "Written on our bones and stamped in our hearts"

1981-2006 is a time span measured by the earth's 25 cycles around the sun, 25 years in world history. However, for the Vietnamese Dominicans in Calgary this time span is not objectively cosmologic but subjectively anthropologic (It is not mainly related to the universe but to people). For us, 1981-2006 is not measured by physical time but by the footprints of the first Dominican Friar who *"brought the Good News"* (Isa 52:7) to the land of Calgary and afterwards by the other Friars' lives, preaching, and service of *"the Word"*.

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of a community we normally think of a specific time frame, however, with what do we measure time? Upon which criteria do we rely in saying that the Vicariate has been established for 25 years? Talking about time, we often think in terms of past, present, and future. The past is what has gone, thus, it no longer exists. The future is what has not yet come, thus, it is not real. What is the present then? When we say *"present"*, immediately the word *"present"* has gone into the past. Time is constantly passing. We cannot use passing things as measurement. St. Augustine, in his *Confession* (book 11, chapter 27) spent considerable energy meditating upon time and eternity. I think what he found is appropriate to what we are celebrating today. He used a sung note to establish a means of measuring time. He supposed that he would sound a note; a moment later, he would sound a second note which was shorter than the first; a moment later, he would sound the third note which was longer than the second but shorter than the first. How did he know the different lengths of the notes? After deep thought and extended reflection he came to this conclusion: the reason he could differentiate the length of the notes was that they were in his memory. Thus, for St. Augustine and also for the Vietnamese Dominican Friars on the occasion of their 25th anniversary, time exists with us, in our minds and hearts. How do we know that the Vietnamese Dominican Vicariate has existed for 25 years here in Calgary? It is because this period has become part of the lives of the Vietnamese Dominican Friars in this area; thus, those friars have made up the Vicariate's time and history.

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Vicariate is an opportunity for us to give thanks to God who brought the first of us to the city of Calgary and to show our appreciation for the offering of their lives to the Vicariate up to the present. Unfortunately, in the last five years of serving the Word, we have buried our three pioneer-friars one after the other. **Joseph Nguyen Cong Ly** († August 08, 2001), the first Vicar Provincial appointed by the Master of the Order (1980-1987), **Dominic Ngo Hung Nghia** († May 12, 2004), Vicar Provincial from 1987-1991, and **Joseph Truong Quang Canh** († October 04, 2004), the eldest of all the Vietnamese friars in North America. All three passed away in Vancouver and lay in eternal rest at *The Good Shepherd's Cemetery* in Calgary. *"If I can see farther than other people, it is because I am standing on the shoulders of giants"* (Newton). Beloved Brothers, you were indeed

giants because you carried us on your shoulders so that we and our future generations could stand high and see farther. Your journey is finished and your founding roles are complete. Now you are not physically with us so we cannot repay you for the good you have done for us. What we now do to show our thankfulness to you is *"write on our bones and stamp in our hearts"* your teachings, your sacrifices, and your works for God for your fellow Dominicans, and for the faithful.

Gift of Life: Being *"stamped in our hearts and kept in our very being"*

"What have you that you did not receive?" (1Cor 4:7) St. Paul's saying is so appropriate to the feelings of the Vietnamese Dominican Friars as we celebrate our Silver Jubilee of service to the Word of God in North America. Whatever we have now, we received it from God through benefactors, relatives and friends near and far. We, the Friars of the Vicariate, first acknowledge the gift of life and upbringing given us by our parents who so generously and kindly offered their sons to God through the Order of Preachers. You are truly parents of us all. While we are joyfully gathered together and enjoying each friar's talents, we would like to use Poet Rabindranath Tagore's words to express our sincere gratitude to you, our parents: *"Be thankful for the light of a candle and yet not to forget the person who patiently holds the candle in the night"*. You have been so patiently holding lit candles, supporting us with your prayers; your love and kindness will always be *"stamped in our hearts and kept in our very being"*.

Kindness and Generosity: Being *"Acknowledged and Passed on"*

During the past 25 years of the Vicariate's establishment and development, we must also count up love, kindness, generosity, and the physical and spiritual supports of many people. We acknowledge in a special way the members of St. Martin de Porres' Association for Fostering Dominican Vocations, benefactors, friends and the faithful from different countries. Although most of the Friars have not met each of you in person, your aids, supports and prayers are always *"respectfully received"* and *"sincerely acknowledged"*. People say: *"Gratitude is the heart's memory"*, we not only treasure your kindness and generosity in our hearts, but we also wish to express in words our appreciation. You have contributed greatly to the Vicariate's establishment and development during the last 25 years. Our gratitude and words of thanks fall short in expressing the extent of our appreciation for your kindness and generosity. Thus, we would like to share a short story written by Fr. Anthony de Mello, S.J. in order to show our gratitude and also to express our sincere desire to pass on to coming generations what we have received from you:

After a monsoon rain, a very old man went out and dug some holes in his garden.

"What are you doing?" his neighbor asked.

"Planting mango trees" was the reply.

"Do you expect to eat mangoes from those trees?"

"No, I won't live long enough for that. But others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude." (Anthony de Mello, SJ, *Taking Flight*, New York: Image Books, 1988, p. 160-161)

Continuing to "*serve the Word*" in the coming years, and to train the future "*Preachers of the Word*" is the true expression of gratitude that the Vietnamese Dominicans in Calgary would like to offer you. We promise "*not to let any of God's Words fall to the ground*" (1 Sam 3:19), but to always treasure the Word and let it change us, sanctify us, and shape us to be "*ministers of the Word*" (Acts 6:4a). Your love and generosity towards the Vietnamese Dominican Friars of St. Vincent Liem Vicariate have borne much fruit in the last 25 years. This fruit will continue to grow in the up-coming years in the younger generations of the Vicariate. May these generations "*yield thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold*" (Mark 4:8). Amen.

*Gratitude to God
And
Thanks to You All.*