



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Reverend Gustavo Garcia-Siller



Homily – 40th Anniversary of the Vietnamese Martyrs
November 26, 2015

I am happy to join you for your 40th anniversary celebration; a moment of Grace for which you can be justifiably thankful and proud. Yes, this Catholic faith community started 40 years ago, but your story began long before that. Your story began with the first proclamation of the gospel and was animated by the shedding of the first drop of a Vietnamese Martyr's blood. Your story grew from a legacy of courage and faith handed down by tens of thousands of saints who sacrificed their lives rather than betray Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior. Your San Antonio story began in a humble house on French Street and has grown from 50 families who sought to freely live and witness to their faith in their new home. Your story reflects the best of the values that built our country and is defined by the faithful generosity of the many families whose journey of faith led us to this landmark anniversary. As we thank God for this "Family of Families", let us also

express our heartfelt gratitude for all who have provided the spiritual leadership that has built this community throughout the past 4 decades, and certainly we are thankful for the dedication of your current pastor, Father (Francis) Hau Quang Pham.

The Vietnamese Martyrs placed Jesus above everything....even their own lives. However, in this morning's Gospel, Jesus proclaims,

"Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is telling us that this blessing brings with it a joy that is complete, peaceful, and eternal.

The inheritance of the persecuted is the undeniable presence of God in their lives, bringing with it the reward of God's heavenly kingdom.

Our beloved martyrs, in making the ultimate sacrifice, testified to their unshakable trust in Jesus' promise we find in John's gospel: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled...I am going to prepare a place for you...Where I am going, you know the way."*

In this morning's gospel, Jesus turns upside-down the world's understanding of what brings peace and joy into our lives. He gives us the "Owner's Manual" for our souls, teaching us how to grow in God's Grace, building his kingdom in our hearts through unselfish sacrifice and love. Through mourning, meekness, and mercy we sow the seeds of love in the lives of others while reaping a harvest of peace and joy in our own lives.

Jesus tells us that when we hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness in the world and share the Peace of Christ with others, then we will claim our birthright in Heaven. Finally, when the moment comes for us to stand alongside Jesus, defending and affirming our faith, even at the risk of giving all we have, we will be given the greatest eternal reward.

Pope Francis, while teaching about the Beatitudes challenges us to make them our own. *"Dear friends, the New Covenant consists, in fact, of this: in recognizing ourselves in Christ, enveloped by mercy and the compassion of God. This is what fills our heart with joy, and it is this that makes our life a beautiful and credible testimony of the love of God for all the brothers we meet every day."*

When we live the beatitudes, we are the conscience of our society.

Jesus warns us that this can be a very uncomfortable place to be.

However, Jesus also tells us not to listen to the world's false promises of joy and satisfaction. No, it is Jesus who will bring happiness into your heart if we follow his plan. As we learn from today's reading from the book of Wisdom: *"The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and no torment shall touch them."* Remember, this is a pledge made for the soul, not the body. As Jesus tells us, *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul..."* As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, that sadness and anxiety, famine or

nakedness, or the threat of death will not *"separate us from the love of Christ"*. We may face persecution when we are people of the beatitudes in the workplace, or speaking out on the values we hold dear, or even when we proclaim Christ in our own families. When we do, let us be comforted that *"...we conquer (all) overwhelmingly through Him who loved us"*.

On this Thanksgiving Day, let us be mindful *"That the Lord has done great things for us."* Let us give thanks for the "Blessings" that Jesus promises. Today, as we give thanks for the beauty and inspiration of "Your Story of faith"; let us hold in our hearts the words of Saint John Paul II, *"Remember the past with gratitude. Live the presence with enthusiasm. Look forward to the future with confidence."* May we all share in this joyous occasion, proclaiming, *Ven! Holy Spirit. Ven!*