Voices of Sisters



Vietnamese faithful pray beside the grave of Fr. Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep at Tac Say Pilgrimage Center in southern Vietnam. Father Francis, a martyr, is to be canonized as a Catholic saint on July 2 at the center. (Courtesy of Mary Nguyen)

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Holiness, in Vietnam, is not an idea. At Tac Say Pilgrimage Center in Bac Lieu province in southern Vietnam, it is remembered through a priest who refused to leave his people during the war, who chose to die in their place, and whose grave continues to draw thousands who come seeking his intercession. Fr. Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep's life and death inspire devotion not only in Vietnam but also among many Vietnamese living abroad.

Father Francis was born Jan. 1, 1897, in Long Xuyên, a city in southern Vietnam. In 1924, he was ordained a priest in Phnom Penh by Bishop Jean-Baptiste-Maximilien Chabalier, a French missionary. A few years later, he was sent to serve as parish priest of Tac Say Parish, in Bac Lieu province, also in southern Vietnam.

Between 1945 and 1946, southern Vietnam was unstable in the aftermath of World War II, as conflict grew between Vietnamese nationalist forces and returning French authorities and many parishioners were forced to leave their homes. The superior of Bac Lieu Diocese and French priests advised Father Francis to go to Bac Lieu for safety, promising he could return to Tac Say when the situation stabilized. He refused saying, "I live among my flock, and if I die, I will die among my flock. I will not go anywhere."



The remains of Fr. Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep were moved to Tac Say Parish in 1969, 23 years after soldiers killed him in the wake of the war. (Courtesy of Mary Nguyen)

In 1946, he was arrested along with more than 70 parishioners at Tac Say Parish. Soldiers planned to kill them all, but Father Francis said he was their shepherd and asked to die in their place. The others were released, but he was taken and killed in a nearby pond.

The parishioners later found his body. He had been beheaded and his body bore multiple wounds. He had been stripped of his clothes, like Jesus on the cross. Yet his hands remained folded on his chest, as if he was praying, and his face was calm, without any sign of fear. Father Francis died as a martyr on March 12, 1946, and was buried at Khuc Treo Church.

Twenty-three years later, in 1969, his remains were exhumed and moved to Tac Say, where he had served as pastor for sixteen years.

I traveled for nearly 12 hours to Tac Say Pilgrimage Center to visit Father Francis' tomb. According to tradition, the parish celebrates an annual memorial Mass to pray for him. When it first began, only a few people attended, but it has become a very large pilgrimage, gathering Catholics and non-Catholics across Vietnam as well as those living abroad who also return to pray at his tomb.

Father was a shepherd who not only gave his life for his flock but he always showed God's mercy to everyone, especially non-Catholics, the poor and those in need. Many people report blessings through his intercession: couples who prayed for children, unemployed people who found work, and the sick who were healed.



Plaques at Tac Say Pilgrimage Center list the names of people who return to give thanks after receiving favors through the intercession of Fr. Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep, a Vietnamese priest who was martyred in 1946. (Courtesy of Mary Nguyen)

According to Vietnamese custom, anyone who receives a blessing, returns to give thanks. Their names are written on boards at the Pilgrimage Center: "My name is … I come from Dong Nai province," or "from the USA," or "from Canada." There are so many names they cannot all be counted.

I have also felt his love for me. About 20 years ago, I could not travel to his tomb, so I prayed in front of his portrait. Through his intercession, God healed me of an ear infection. Since then, the illness has never returned, and I have visited him many times to give thanks, remembering his soul in my daily prayers.

My own experience is just one of countless testimonies of Father Francis' intercession. His life of holiness continues to inspire and guide the faithful, a devotion now recognized by the church which has officially recognized his holiness.

Vietnam will witness its first-ever canonization celebration. The Diocese of Can Tho received a letter from the Holy See approving the canonization of Fr. Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep. His beatification Mass will be presided over by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, the special representative of Pope Leo XIV, on July 2 at Tac Say Pilgrimage Center.

I am truly happy for all Vietnamese believers, Father Francis is not only a faithful servant of God, but also a holy pastor, always pleasing to God in word and action. And now we know he has a special place in God's heart.

May God give me a holy life so that like him, I can love and serve everyone without distinction — the poor and the rich, Catholics and non-Catholics and to bring God's love to the sisters in my community, my neighbors, my family and those in difficult situations, like a true disciple of Christ.

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