

The Road to Hope

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Your Eminences, Excellencies, priests, religious brothers and sisters, family and friends, I am here with you, in communion with my sister Agnes Anh Tuyet in Australia, my only surviving sister, with all our children and grandchildren, with our extended family from different parts of the world, and with my husband and my cousins from the United States and Europe, who are here with us in this beautiful hall.

Together, we wish to express our deep gratitude for the opportunity to offer our testimony on this memorable 50th anniversary of the time when my brother Thuận, while under house arrest in Cay Vong, wrote down 1,001 meditations, beginning in August 1975 and continuing until March 19, 1976, the Solemnity of St. Joseph.

At the end of the 1970s, when our family, then refugees in Sydney, Australia, began receiving these meditations, copied by hand by the *boat people*¹ who arrived there before settling in various refugee camps in different parts of the world, our mother burst into tears – but they were tears of joy and gratitude to God. She immediately contacted everyone to tell them: “...my son is honouring the legacy of his ancestors.”

As you may know, between 1845 and 1862 our ancestors were among those who suffered the harsh persecution of Christians who were branded on the face with the words *Tà Dao* (“evil religion”). Their villages were destroyed and their property confiscated. Christian families were forcibly dispersed, and their members – parents, sons, and daughters – were separated from one another and sent to live with non-Christian communities far from their homes. The intention was to make them forget their faith. But these Christians remained united emotionally and spiritually throughout the long years of separation, holding on to prayers or to a phrase from the Gospel written on scraps of paper and hidden among their personal belongings.

Those who could neither read nor write, like our great-great-grandmother, repeated from memory each day the words of a prayer they had chosen. Through their

perseverance, they managed to keep the presence of Jesus alive, and this kept them united in faith even when they were physically separated.

Decades later, in 1975, while under house arrest in Cay Vong, 1,001 meditations were written and secretly sent out, bringing the presence of Jesus to believers who were living through great difficulties. They began a journey of evangelization from one family to another, from prison cells to reeducation camps, before finally crossing the oceans and reaching different parts of the world with the *boat people*. At the beginning of the 1980s, these meditations became the book *The Road of Hope*, first published in Australia in both Vietnamese and English, thanks to the joint efforts of Australian Christian communities and the dedication of Peter Bookallil, who prepared the first translation from Vietnamese into English.

Today, together with you and in a spirit of gratitude, we bear witness to the power of God's presence through the story of a shepherd who, though separated from his flock, nevertheless remained deeply united with everyone through the Word of God.

¹ The term *boat people* was used to refer to refugees from South Vietnam who fled by small boats following the takeover of the South by North Vietnam.