

***PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK ON THE “PASTORAL LETTERS”
OF CARDINAL VAN THUAN***

(July 5th, 2013)

Welcome Address

On behalf of all the members of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, His Excellency Bishop Mario Toso and Ms. Flaminia Giovanelli, as well as the officials of the Pontifical Council, I wish to greet and thank the authorities present, the speakers, guests and journalists, who have kindly come to participate in today’s presentation of the volume “*Lettere pastorali. Sulle orme del Concilio Vaticano II*” (Pastoral Letters. In the Wake of Vatican II), edited by the *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace* and published by the *Libreria Editrice Vaticana (LEV)*, dedicated to six *Pastoral Letters* of the Servant of God, Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan.

We are immediately struck by the beauty and moving strength of these letters written by my great predecessor at the head of the Pontifical Council between 1968 and 1973. They were published in Vietnamese in 1996 under the title, which I translate in English: “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.”

A little over a year has passed since his remains were transferred to the church of Santa Maria della Scala, in Trastevere, his titular church: we treasure this unforgettable moment, with the filled church and the assembly so deeply moved.

It's little known that, in our Council, we have the custom of celebrating Mass together every Friday morning and always conclude with a beautiful prayer for Cardinal Van Thuan, a kind of meditation on the fact that he was an authentic hero of the faith, a bright figure and a model for all.

As it is said in this prayer, he was “for the Church and for the world, a bright light of unity and forgiveness, of justice and peace.” And also: “His kindness and his episcopal ministry radiated the light of faith, the enthusiasm of hope and the ardor of charity.”

Since my appointment as President of the Pontifical Council, my thoughts have often turned to Cardinal Van Thuan and to what he would have thought about different questions, and how he would act today in face of the serious problems we are dealing with on a daily basis. In this sense, he has always been a great model and master for me. That is why I would like to once again express my joy, all our joy, for the successful conclusion of the diocesan phase of the beatification process.

Cardinal Van Thuan was an apostle of joy and hope, a prophetic pastor in the shining wake of the Second Vatican Council, to which he was very close. I would like to recall his episcopal motto: “Gaudium et Spes,” “Joy and Hope,” the title of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World—the text most frequently quoted in the *Letters*—, perhaps the key document that was prepared in the course of the Council's work.

In May, with the entire staff of the Pontifical Council, we attended the Mass celebrated by the Holy Father Francis in the Chapel of Santa Marta. On that occasion, as on many others, the Pope invited everyone to witness courageously, to be filled with apostolic zeal, and he used the word “fire,” in reference to St. Paul.

I think that Cardinal Van Thuan truly represents all of that: the courage to hope. “Courage” and “hope” are certainly two words that come to my mind when I think of him.

On April 13th, in another morning meditation, Pope Francis said: “We must not be afraid of problems. Jesus himself said this to his disciples! “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” Despite life’s difficulties, the problems, and new things that we have to take as they come..., the Lord is there. We can make mistakes—that’s true—but he is always beside us.”¹

This spirit, this gift, this message is indeed what the reader breathes in when reading and pondering over these *Pastoral Letters*, which will now be commented from different perspectives. I hope, therefore, with all my heart that our volume can help to make known the story of Cardinal Van Thuan, his actions imbued with great humanity and heroism, but also the terrible vicissitudes experienced when he was imprisoned, detained, beaten, with his people, by the blind violence of totalitarianism.

So, I gladly give the floor to distinguished speakers and assure you my prayers and blessings.

May the Lord be with us all on the road of the example that was given to us by the Servant of God Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan.

Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson

President

¹ Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae: “No Gossip, No Fear,” Saturday, 13 April 2013, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Ed. In English, N. 16, 17 April 2013.