

**ADDRESS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEDICATION OF**  
**THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF LA VANG**  
**AT CHRIST CATHEDRAL IN THE DIOCESE OF ORANGE**  
**GARDEN GROVE, CALIFORNIA**  
**JULY 17, 2021**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to the United States, I greet you in his name and express the closeness of Pope Francis as you we dedicate the Shrine of Our Lady of La Vang here on the campus of Christ Cathedral in the Diocese of Orange. I thank His Excellency Bishop Kevin Vann and the staff of the Cathedral, as well as the many officials of the Diocese of Orange, for their kindness and hospitality. I am particularly grateful for the presence of the Vietnamese faithful here today.

The presence of this Shrine reminds us of the diversity, and, indeed, the catholicity of the Church, especially here in California. Pope Francis teaches us:

“The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have one cultural expression, but ‘rather remaining true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.’ In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the ‘beauty of her varied face.’” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 116)

The beauty of the face of the Virgin who appeared to the Vietnamese faithful amid persecution brings consolation and hope. Her appearance during the time of persecution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent devotion to her during renewed persecution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a reminder that God does not abandon His people. Truly, Christ comes to us in our suffering through Mary, who stood faithfully by her Son at the foot of the Cross. Mary has stood by the Vietnamese people.

Many Vietnamese suffered terribly at the time of the fall of Saigon, experiencing torture and imprisonment. Vietnamese Catholics know the experience of enduring persecution, fleeing as refugees, and suffering the loneliness that comes from being separated from family, homeland, and culture. They know well the struggles of being immigrants and of linguistic difficulties, and yet they persevere. They persevere, accompanied by the Mother of God.

The experience of suffering and of perseverance can enrich the Church in the United States, because Vietnamese Catholics do not understand faith as merely a set of teachings. Faith is not lived as something purely formal or abstract; it is a lived reality. There has been an *existential* experience of suffering, which has led to greater conformity to the Crucified One. This experience has an evangelizing power. Stories of the heroic virtues of your elders in the faith are passed on the from generation to generation. The power of these stories, like the power of the Gospel, can lead to the conversion of many in American society.

The Gospel we just heard is not one of suffering but one of joy. Mary could have been trapped in solitude, wondering what to do after the Archangel Gabriel left her. What would she tell Joseph? What explanation could she give to her family of the townspeople? How much responsibility for such a young person to bear!

Instead of wallowing in misery and doubt, she went forth with joy to greet her kinswoman Elizabeth and sang her great canticle of praise. She gives us the example of a Church going forth. Mary arrived at an important decision to say *Yes* to God and later to visit Elizabeth, by taking her time and thinking things through.

Commenting on this passage, Pope Francis reminds us:

“It is difficult in life to take decisions. We often tend to put them off, to let others decide instead. We frequently prefer to let ourselves be dragged along by events, to follow the current fashion; at times, we know what we ought to do but do not have the courage to do it, or it seems too difficult because it means swimming against the tide. In the Annunciation, in the Visitation ... Mary goes against the tide; she listens to God, she reflects and seeks to understand reality and decides to entrust herself totally to God. Although she is with child, she decides to visit her elderly relative and she decides to entrust herself to her Son with insistence so as to preserve the joy of the wedding feast.”  
(Address of the Holy Father, 31 May 2013)

There are many in this country who are tempted to slip into despair when confronted with the challenges of life or great physical or emotional suffering. We have recently witnessed this during the pandemic. The Shrine in honor of Our Lady of La Vang reminds us never to despair but to place our trust in Mary and her Son, so that we can continue our pilgrimage in this life as we journey to our eternal home.

Although at the Annunciation and Visitation, Mary gives us the good example of listening and reflecting, so that we may reach a decision to take prophetic action, her canticle reminds us of what we shall be doing eternally in heaven – praising God for His blessings.

Until that time, we carry on – one step at a time – knowing that we move forward with Mary by our side. Of this moving forward in pilgrimage, Pope Francis says:

Pilgrimage is a symbol of life. It makes us think of life as walking, as a path. If a person does not walk, but instead stays still, this is not useful; it accomplishes nothing. Think of water: when water is not in the river, it does not course, but instead it remains still and stagnates. A soul that does not walk in life doing good, doing many things that one must do for society, to assist others, or who does not walk through life seeking God and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, is a soul that finishes in mediocrity and in spiritual poverty. Please do not stand still in life! (Pope Francis, Message to Participants in the 37<sup>th</sup> Nocturnal Pilgrimage from Macerata to Loreto, 6 June 2015)

In Washington, DC, at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, there is a Chapel in honor of Our Lady of La Vang. Many pilgrims journey there. Each year in Carthage, Missouri, in the center of the country, the Marian Days are held and draw 100,000 of the Vietnamese faithful. These days not only foster devotion to Our Lady, but they allow Catholics to journey together as families and

communities, to bring the scattered together in unity. Now, with the dedication of this Shrine, those on the West Coast will have a place to honor and cherish the Mother of God.

It is my sincere hope that consoled and strengthened by Our Lady of La Vang, and the mercy offered by her Son, all may find renewed faith and courage along the journey to our eternal home.