

On behalf of His Eminence Cardinal Wuerl, Bishop Knestout, my fellow priests and the religious present, allow me to express to you the members of Fr An's family and to all the parish my deepest sympathy and condolences on Fr An's passing. A time of sadness and grief to be sure but also one of hope, hope born from faith.

Two views about death are contrasted in the opening verses of the 1st reading today from the Book of Wisdom. The souls of the just are in the hand of God; we're told they are in Peace. But the foolish saw the passing away of the dead as an affliction, their going forth utter destruction.

Who are these foolish ones? They are the ones without faith. They are the ones who live only for this world, like pessimists who would say: "we are born but to die."

The Christian, however, has no such foolish outlook. He knows that death is not an ending, but rather a beginning. The Christian, knowing that Christ has forever destroyed the power of death, is the optimist, who says:

We are not born but to die, we die that we might be born.

Still for those who survive the death of a loved one, this loss of separation can be most intense, for many, the heaviest cross they will carry in this life.

We know that death is inevitable for each of us. We would prefer not to think of it, but it looms over us as something mysterious; and it is the uninvited or unwelcomed guest when it comes.

St Anselm, writing in the 12th century said: "**Nothing is more certain than death, nothing more uncertain than its hour.**"

But it is among the greatest of consolations for us to know from Christ's own words that He has gone before us to prepare a place for us that we might be with Him.

So to each of you his dear family members, his siblings: Bin, Twong, Kung, Hun, Toom, and Bee, his dear mother Hway (who could not be here today), his aunt Sr Rosello Lanh, his sister Yen still in Vietnam, and all the family, you have many fond

memories from your years together, photos and other memorabilia, but remember most of all the legacy of faith that Fr An left for you to follow. And for the parishioners here of Our Lady of Vietnam, You've been through a lot in losing two pastors in the space of only 6 years. But Faith pulls us through.

We pray the words in our creedal formula: I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting...

We have the words of our Savior to deepen our faith: **I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me even if he dies will live, and he who lives and believes in Me will never die.**

Fr An lived to be only 55. If we're honest, it's certainly not the fullness of years we would all hope for, it's less than the "70 years or 80 for those who are strong," that The Psalmist mentions in his prayer.

But the saints enlighten us with their wisdom. St Paul, for his part, said that **"once this earthly dwelling is destroyed, we have a dwelling not made with hands but eternal in heaven."** And his faith was so strong he would go on to say **"we would be away from the body and at home with the Lord."**

St Therese of Lisieux, one of Fr An's favorites, lived to be only 24. When she was in her last illness a priest ministering to her said, "Sister, are you resigned to die? She replied: "Oh Father, I think it is the living who need resignation. Besides, I am not dying, I am entering into life."

We do well to recall that death is not final but only a temporary separation. As the words say in the preface of the Mass: "For your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven."

I recall when the elderly mother of a priest I know was near her end, she was not communicative or responsive. Of course many prayers were being offered for her including from the religious community of the Missionaries of Charity.

Then in the presence of her priest son, right before she passed, she came to. She raised her head, opened her eyes and made a gesture with her hand and said: "See you later," then passed away.

For the faithful, death can indeed be a blessing. It is a great consolation that Fr An was courageous in his suffering and because of his faith was able to find hope even as he faced his final struggle. Fr An had the grace of a happy death. Cardinal Wuerl saw to that when he graciously visited Fr recently to give him the last sacraments and the apostolic blessing of the Church. Fr An died a happy death, a holy death. May we all have the grace of having such a blessed departure when our time comes.

I was a good friend of Fr An's since our seminary days together. What I think I liked most about Fr An was his quietness, his calmness. He was a man of few words but was amiable and at times humorous. Like the time when, in the company of a number of his fellow seminarians, he threatened the house dog Bosco, that belonged to the Seminary rector Msgr Ken Roeltgen, saying that if he didn't behave, he was going to have him for dinner. We laughed because we thought perhaps he might be half serious.

Another thing I liked about him was that he didn't have an ambitious bone in his body, and I was the same. I would kid him about his becoming a bishop, or a cardinal, and I would usually send a letter or a Christmas card and address it to him as An Cardinal Vu and he would respond in kind. Those who knew us best, of course, knew there was never any danger of anything like that ever coming to pass.

For Fr An, it was enough to be a priest, a shepherd of souls, and striving as priests are called to do, to imitate Christ the Good Shepherd. We know the priesthood is not a mere job or a profession. It is meant to give glory to God and to lead those whom we serve to salvation. As St Peter said in his letter: "God's flock is in your midst; give it a shepherd's care."

Fr An wanted to be a priest since the time he was but 5 years of age. He learned His love for the priesthood and the Holy Eucharist from his father who would take

him and his family to Mass in his country village for the usual 4:30 morning Mass. Then after returning home to eat, they would spend the day working in the rice fields. His father had always prayed that one of his seven sons would be a priest, and when An expressed his desire for this holy calling, he let him serve at Mass and learn catechism from the village pastor. Then at age 12 he began in the high school seminary. May the members of this parish community of Our Lady of Vietnam seek to impart in their own children's hearts the same love for God and for the holy priesthood.

Fr An had a long road to the priesthood because the Communists closed the seminaries. He was fortunate enough eventually to come to this country. He finished college and joined the Trinitarians for a while, volunteered at Catholic Charities for a couple of years, and then Msgr. Peter Long and Fr. Joseph Bui helped him to realize his dream here in the Archdiocese where he was ordained in 1995.

God chose him to share in that awesome vocation, conferring on him the dignity of the sacred priesthood.

The patron of priests, St John Vianney once said: "A priest himself will not understand the greatness of his vocation until he is in heaven. If he understood it on earth, he would die, not out of fear, but out of love. And the power of the priest - who by his word can turn a piece of bread into God!"

Fr An served wherever he was assigned such as St Mary of the Assumption or Holy Family where he was first named pastor. I thought it would be natural for him in coming here, but later learned it was daunting for Fr An to do so, to replace Msgr. Long, the founding pastor and leader of this community through whom this Church was built. But he accepted it as God's will for him and admirably persevered in it.

Something else about Fr An. There was a peace he exuded that made him seem nearly unshakeable. Dominic was his baptismal name. But his name An means "peace." And "Vu" means "fighting for." Fighting for Peace - here was a man that lived true to his name.

He served among the people here, a people very resilient, and left his mark on the parish. He left it with an enhanced sense of peace and unity. When he was diagnosed in 2008 with stage 4 cancer, he continued to serve although at the time he was only given a couple of years to live. He could have taken a medical leave but he stayed. Later surgery left him unable to stand with any reasonable balance and unable to see very well. In spite of that he continued to stay to the end. He knew his place was here. He once told me: The people just need to know someone loves them.

Near the end, the last several weeks or so, his condition would not allow him to offer Mass. Mass would be offered in his room, and he received each day the Bread of Life, that “medicine of immortality,” as St Ignatius called it.

He said he was still praying for that miracle, such as Our Lady worked at Lourdes. But not even St Bernadette was healed there of her infirmity. The promise Our Lady made to her was not for happiness in this life, but in the next.

The Holy Eucharist gave Fr An the strength to persevere, to carry in his own flesh the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus might also be manifest in him.

May it also be so for us. May our faith in the Holy Eucharist be steadfast. The Lord makes that promise: **“He who believes in Me has eternal life and I will raise Him up on the last day.”** As we know, it is in the Holy Eucharist that the Lord makes this promise a reality, for **“whoever eats this Bread,”** He said, **“will live forever.”**

Fr An’s eyes are closed now to the pain and suffering of this world but opened to the eternal life which was made for Him and which Christ has prepared for Him. We pray for him, that if he is not now enjoying the fullness of life and that heavenly blessedness, he may do so soon.

May we priests continue to strive after The One whom St John said: **“having loved those who were His own in the world, He loved them to the end.”**

May each of us, priests and laity alike, continue to fight the good fight of faith, “fighting for peace,” so that as peacemakers, we may indeed be children of God in name and in fact, and one day inherit the blessings God has prepared for us.