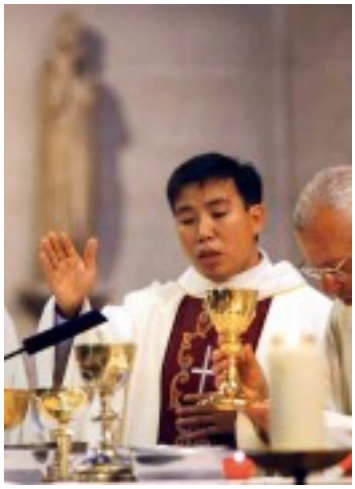


Here in Saigon the members of the scholastic community begin their day together in the chapel at 5:15 AM. That means that you have to take responsibility yourself to wake up. I told Dennis when we went to bed the first night here in Vietnam (VN) that he should not feel that he had to be there.

It was very hard to sleep the first night ---maybe because·I had been away for nine years and so much was going through my mind and heart. I went to bed around 3:30 AM hoping that I could sleep a little and I did. I woke up around 5. At that time,·one of the·priests, Fr. Peter Thang who·was going·out to celebrate Mass for another community, was very surprised when I greeted him in the morning. He kept say how sorry they were·for not picking us up at the airport.

We sat quietly in the chapel for meditation for thirty minutes, then we sang the Morning Prayer. Mornings are cooler and it was around 75ºF. In the chapel, I remembered that today some of you may have been on the road, some of you in the kitchen cooking, some of you taking advantage of the holiday to rest, etc. Happy Thanksgiving to all!

The community has two priests and 5 scholastics (student brothers). 4 of them just made their first profession in August 2010. They are studying either at the Christian Brother or Franciscan Institutes. After a simple breakfast, each one is busy with his duties. Some went to class, others did home-work, etc.

While I was speaking to Fr. Peter Thang who had come back from the Mass outside of the community, Dennis came in. He had his first Vietnamese breakfast on Thanksgiving Day: a

piece of bread, an egg, a small cup of “dark coffee” with condensed milk, and of course tea. Our plan for the day was to visit the AA communities in Saigon and other houses attached to them.

First, Dennis and I had a good laugh when we put our helmets on. I had encouraged Dennis to go on motorcycle and if it did not work, we could take taxi.

Our initial stop was the first Foyer (student center) which the Assumptionists of the Province of France bought in 1999. It is a residence for male students where Fr. Peter Thang goes and stays every Tuesday and celebrates Mass on Wednesday for them. Those who apply to live here have to meet two conditions: the desire and capacity to engage in university studies but the inability, for whatever reason to cover the costs. Tey must also be willing to take their Christian faith seriously and to engage in serious vocational discernment (whether to the priesthood, religious life, or married life). They are freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Here they are introduced to the many vocations of the Church from which they will find the best fit for them with the help of Fr. Peter Thang. Fr. Peter said that 30 % of these students are thinking of joining the Assumptionists. They live in a very simple setting: common bedroom (8 beds in one room), two common study rooms, a chapel, a kitchen and dining room. They all take turns preparing two meals a day for all 20 of them.

Driving from this Foyer less than a mile, we arrived at the Postulant Community where there are two priests, a religious (who made final professed last August - the first Vietnamese religious to make final profession in VN), and 7 postulants. The apostolates of this community are teaching and chaplaincies at three local hospitals, in addition to their postulancy formation.

From this community, we went to visit the “Discernment House.” When we arrived, they were having lunch. This is the only community where we were able to meet all the members because they have all graduated from University. 60 % of their time is spent studying language (French). The rest of their time is learning to live together. They come from the student residence or through other means (word of mouth, relationship with other Assumptionists, etc.). They stay here from 6 months to 1 year depending on each person. Their next step of formation is moving on to postulancy. They have to meet with their spiritual directors every week: Fr. Peter Thang who lives with the scholastic community or Fr. Peter Huyen who is in charge of the Foyer. The main apostolate of this community is taking care of the Orphanage Hoa Hue (Lily Flower). They take turns STAYING and SERVING at the orphanage on a three-month rotation.

