





I know I am lagging behind Fr. Dennis' account but·I have so much to say.

Tuesday was a traveling day for us. After breakfast with the seminarian community, we had enough time to clean our room and we left at 10:30 AM. We rented a car so that we could stop along the way to see some of my friends who now serve as pastor or assistant and to visit some of my family's friends who have been with my family in all the many difficult moments of life. When we said good bye, the director of studies told Dennis that it was a mistake when Dennis let me plan the trip. It only takes 3-4 hours to drive from Da lat to Phuong Lam; but if Dennis was coming with me, we would need a day…because I had to make so many stops…. I did not tell Dennis too much about this, but I thought that he would give me enough space in which I could be myself in this context and that he wouldn't mind having another new adventure.

I also have a friend who comes to the Seminary every Monday to help the seminarians out, stays overnight and returns to his parish the following Tuesday. I offered him a ride, so we were four in all now: Dennis, my friend, our driver and myself.

The first stop was a restaurant on the road. It was 11:30 a.m. Again… we had “pho.” A quick lunch but it gave us enough energy to move on. Before we reached the restaurant, my friend and I did the talking. We shared a lot of information which we thought each should know even if the night before we had talked after dinner. We were so happy to see each other. He was one of my close friends. After ordination, he was able to study for two years in Toulouse, France. On the one hand, I would have liked to talk to Dennis and invite him into our conversation. On the other hand, language was an issue, not to mention that Dennis didn't experience the things were discussing. Sometimes, my friend would remind me that I should talk to Dennis. I told him that Dennis was busy figuring out the music dimensions of our tonal language. We stopped at his parents’ house for a “few minutes,” just enough for me to finish a big grapefruit, two cups of tea and to give my friend’s parents, his two sisters and his brother a hug. They asked me about my ordination. I told them that they should start now to raise a baby pig and when the pig is big enough to provide enough meat for a party, I will consider being ordained. They asked how many pigs I wanted... Of course, we had a good laugh…

After dropping my friend off, we continued on our way, just the three of us. I was hoping that Dennis could sleep a little. However, the road gave us the sense of “riding a horse”.

We stopped and visited a friend of my family. This time, Dennis was able to speak some French. I know that this visit brought a lot of comfort to them and my parents as well. They were a generation ahead of my parents who were also the victims of our nation's history. We exchanged some news, sometimes just quietly looking at one another with a deep understanding ----- which was hard to put into words. I found that Dennis was beginning to feel how powerful that time in history was, one that destroyed our daily routine and placed us in a situation in which all there was were tears and silence… They followed us to our car. We did not say good bye, but only that we hoped to see each other again. I thought the visit explained more to Dennis about me and my background.

It was not far from the second stop (7 km). We visited a main church of this area. It was quite big and my friend is an assistant pastor there. I did not have luck this time because my friend had just left for an emergency call at a nearby hospital. I was disappointed at not seeing him. Instead of talking as we did in previous visits, Dennis and I just walked slowly into the church for a few minutes and returned to our car.

We arrived at my grandmother's house around 4 p.m. Dennis was so good to disappear so that I could have all my time with my family. I think Dennis will be better than I to let you know what we experienced there, but I can tell you this: we ate, we talked, and we looked at each other. Dennis had the experience of hearing my grandmother say: "mangia, mangia, mangia…" Immediately some of my friends came to visit me. They brought more fruit, good memories, laughter and news. My mom also phoned us and we spent time to update her on what was going on. After dinner, I ran to visit some of my friends and my family's friends in order to fulfill the duty of my parents. There was something on my chest which made me feel so heavy. I recognized again that this was not my parents' fault, it wasn't my fault. It was just a result of a period of history; we seemed to be born at the wrong time.

I returned home and everyone was sleeping, except my grandmother who was sitting there quietly waiting for me. She just looked at me. I knew my presence meant a lot to her. I slept next to her that night. It was so peaceful. It was really dark outside. The insects were playing their own musical instruments. A dog barked from afar with the high note of a song. I slept immediately because I was so tired. Yes, but it was more than the tiredness. It was the deep peace of my grandmother and she knew at that moment I was so safe in her arms. I was so small and I needed only her regular heart beat to put me to sleep. I slept conscious that she would be sitting there when I awoke and would ask me what I wanted to eat… I slept with a joy that my grandmother would always take care of me as her child… I slept with a sense of being covered with her tenderness when she touched my face with the hard rough hands of a woman 96 years old…..

With my love and until next time…because that Tuesday night, I slept as a baby...

By Br. Dinh Vo Tran Gia

A Vietnamese Diary: Chapter I

A Vietnamese Diary: Chapter II

A Vietnamese Diary: Chapter III

A Vietnamese Diary: Chapter IV

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