

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, February 17th, 2019

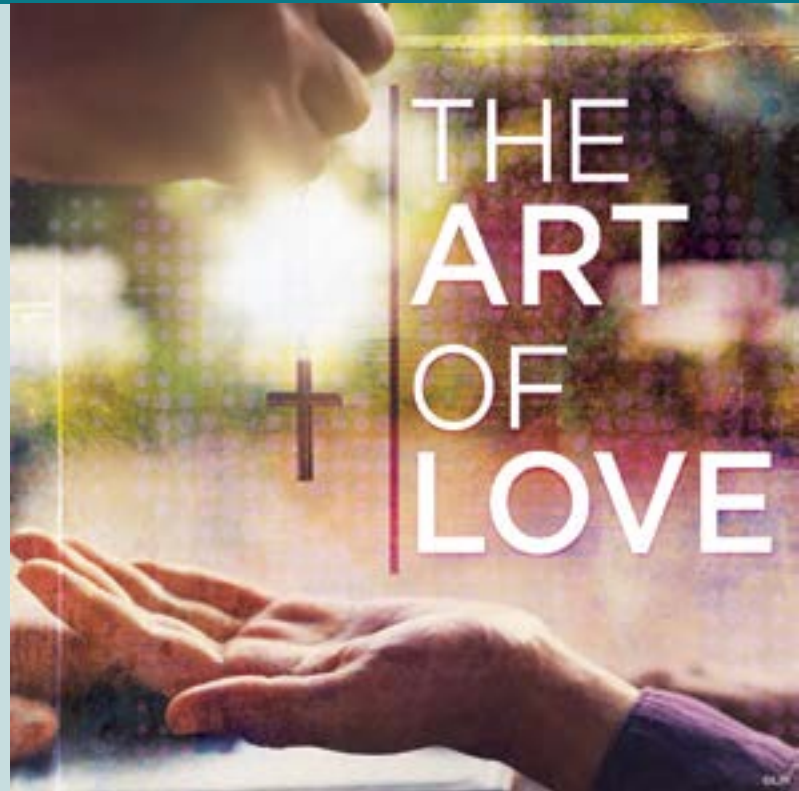
Show-and-Tell

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa, BSC

Jeremiah 17:5-8

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Luke 6:17, 20-26



I remember these assignments in grade school. I was terrified by them. I was afraid to stand in front of my class and didn't think that I would ever make a decent presentation. I also remember my classmates' presentations ... many were fantastic! I learned so much more from their demonstrations and explanations than I did when I just read about these things in textbooks and took notes during lectures.

I think faith in Jesus works in a very similar way.

One of my spiritual heroes is the late Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan from Vietnam. He was the Bishop in Saigon before it was laid siege. He was captured and imprisoned for 13 years, 9 of which were in solitary confinement. After his release, he took refuge in the Vatican. For the Great Jubilee in 2000, St. John Paul II selected Cardinal Van Thuan to lead the spiritual exercises for the Roman Curia. From his time in prison, he learned a sage-like wisdom. He taught that *"we always run the risk of possessing a theory of love, but not enough of the art of love"* ("Testimony of Hope," 68). He shared a story from prison:

When I was in isolation, five police took turns so that there were always two guarding me. The leaders had told them, "We will replace you every two weeks with another group so that you will not be 'contaminated' by this dangerous bishop." In the beginning, the guards did not talk with me. They only answered with a yes or no. I was terribly sad. I started to love them, to love Jesus in them, smiling and exchanging kind words with them. I began to tell stories of my trips abroad, of how people live in America, in Canada, in Japan, in the Philippines ... about economics, about freedom, about technology. This stimulated their curiosity, and they began asking me many questions. Little by little, we became friends. They wanted to learn foreign languages, French, English ... and my guards became my students!

On one occasion, I had to cut wood on a rainy day. I spoke to the guard, "Can I ask you a favor?" "Tell me. I'll help you." "I would like to cut a piece of wood in the shape of a cross." "Don't you know it's severely forbidden to have any religious signs whatsoever?" "I know, but we are friends, and I promise to keep it hidden." "It will be really dangerous for us." "Close your

eyes. I'll do it now, and I'll be really careful." He went away and left me alone. I cut the cross and kept it hidden in a piece of soap — up until the time of my release. This piece of wood, later placed within a metal frame, became my pectoral cross.

In another prison, I asked my guard, who had become my friend, for a piece of electrical wire. Frightened, he said to me, "I learned at the Police Academy that when someone asks for electrical wire, it means they want to kill themselves." I explained to him, "Catholic priests don't commit suicide." "But what do you want to do with electrical wire?" "I would like to make a chain so I can carry my cross." "How can you make a chain with electrical wire? It's impossible!" "If you bring me two small pincers, I'll show you." "It's too dangerous." "But we're friends." Three days later, he came to me. "It's really hard to refuse you anything. Tomorrow night, when it's my shift, I'll bring you a piece of electrical wire. But you have to finish everything in four hours." The next evening, from 7-11, with two little pincers, we cut the electrical wire into pieces the size of matchsticks. We put them together, and the chain was ready by the time the next guard came on duty.

I carry this bishop's pectoral cross and chain with me every day, not because they are remembrances of prison, but because they represent my profound conviction. They constantly remind me that only Christian love — not weapons, not threats, not the media — can change hearts. It is love that prepares the way for the announcement of the Gospel ("Testimony of Hope," 72-74). Cardinal Van Thuan imitated Jesus' style of show-and-tell. Jesus' art of love is followed by his explanation of love ... the Beatitudes of today's Gospel.

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PRAYER

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life
in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own "yes"
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.*

*Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,
pray for us.
Amen. Alleluia!*

— excerpts from the [*"Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mother"*](#)