



## **ASIA/VIETNAM - Cardinal Van Thuan, controversial hero of faith, "for the Vietnamese he is already a saint"**

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "For the faithful he is already a saint. Hundreds of testimonies of Catholics have been collected, many say they prayed and received graces through his intercession. The faithful love him and pray to him already as a saint": This is what is said to Fides by Mgr. Paul Phan Van Hien, Vietnamese priest and spiritual son of Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, on the eve of the closing of the diocesan phase of the process of beatification of the Vietnamese Cardinal. The closing ceremony, presided over by Cardinal Agostino Vallini, vicar of the diocese of Rome, takes place tomorrow, July 5th, in the Lateran Palace in Rome. The day after, cardinal Vallini will preside a Mass of thanksgiving at the church of Santa Maria della Scala, of which Cardinal Van Thuan was the titular.

Mgr. Van Hien met and frequented the cardinal for 40 years. He entered the minor seminary in the diocese of Hue, in 1964 when Van Thuan was Rector and was secretly ordained a priest by Van Thuan, when he was under house arrest in North Vietnam. Mgr. Van Hien talks about the enthusiasm of the faithful in Vietnam: "In Vietnam all Catholics burst with joy. They are organizing parties and celebrations in all the dioceses for tomorrow. Cardinal Van Thuan was a spiritual point of reference and is an example for everyone". "His books - he continues - are published in Vietnamese and translated into many languages. But still today, unfortunately, his writings do not circulate freely. They are not found in bookstores, there are still restrictions on behalf of the government. The government still has a certain mistrust towards this hero of faith. But even non-Catholics ask for his works, which are spread by word of mouth or in person. The government probably fears being 'overshadowed' by the light that emanates from the Cardinal. And the fact that he was in prison for many years makes him a heroic figure and even a little 'controversial'.

Remembering the Cardinal, Mgr. Van Hien says: "The fundamental trait of his spirituality is hope. He wrote many books on hope and above all he fully lived hope in the 13 years spent in prison. Even the spiritual exercises he preached to Pope John Paul II, in 2000, were centered on the theme of hope. He taught us how to live and nourish hope. It is a message to all Vietnamese Catholics today and for the faithful around the world: his example is universal patrimony of the Church".

Born on April 17, 1928, Van Thuan was ordained a priest in 1953 and consecrated bishop of Nha Trang in 1967. Paul VI appointed him coadjutor archbishop of Saigon (now Hochiminville) in 1975, a few months later, he was arrested and imprisoned. He was released and went to Rome, in 1994 he was appointed vice-president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and in 1998 President of the Council, a position he held until his death, on September 16, 2002. The process of beatification started in October 2010. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/07/2013)