

**Bishop Vincent Nguyen**, Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto

**Summary of *"My Spiritual Journey - from a Boat Refugee to a Catholic Bishop in Canada"***

October 31, 2010 - Scarboro Missions

As far back as I can remember, my father's family would gather at our home, my aunts, uncles and cousins and they would always remind us of the story of their great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather, Joseph Can Nguyen. At a very young age Joseph sacrificed his life for his faith, he was martyred for his Catholic beliefs. My Great-great- Grandfather was captured and tied to a post in the Red River by the soldiers from the Imperial court, to force him to renounce his faith

I felt the call to be a priest at a very young age. In Vietnam, you can enter a minor seminary in grade 6. So as I neared the end of grade 5, I was eagerly anticipating my entry and beginning into the religious life. But my dreams were crushed when war broke out that year, it was 1975. The church properties were confiscated, seminaries were closed, and the seminarians had to return to their families. I was heartbroken, my future put on hold, and our lives would never be the same.

Several years after the war, my heart was set on leaving Vietnam to fulfill my dream of becoming a priest one day, after the example of the priests I had known resonating in my mind. My father knew of my desire for freedom, and when I was seventeen years old my father and I sat down in our backyard to discuss my plans for the future. My father asked me if I was sure I wanted to do this, to try and escape, it was my decision. He told me I would be on my own if I did do this, and we talked about the dangers involved in an escape. I told my father that I was ready to go and that I wanted to leave Vietnam.

Our 13 meter boat set sail from Vietnam in 1983; we were attacked by pirates then rescued by an Arabian ship and taken to Japan. The first refugee camp I was sent to was in Omura in Nagasaki, then to Fujisawa, next I was sent to Osaka and the last camp was in Wakayama where I stayed the longest. In Wakayama I lived in a portable on the grounds of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul convent. I was taught Japanese by the sisters while helping them with their apostolic works. I help the sisters take care of the handicapped and disabled people at their school. I helped them feed the poor and even went on trips with the people, all the while awaiting my visa to come to Canada

Just before Christmas in 1984, after one and a half years in Japan, I boarded a plane to Canada, and there I was reunited with my two brothers already living in Toronto. In the next couple of years I completed my high school education in Toronto and then graduated with an Engineering degree from the University of Toronto, all the while learning English, English, and more English.

The following fall I entered Serra House, a place to discern the priesthood, and began my religious life. After one year of discernment I entered St. Augustine's Seminary for the 5 year formation program. I was ordained a priest in 1998 at the age of 32. In the winter of 2009 I was asked by the Holy Father to be a disciple of our Lord, and was consecrated a Bishop in January 2010 at the age of 43.

At my Episcopal Ordination, I chose the motto: "I am with you." With this motto, I want to proclaim to the world my conviction in God love for each one of us. Jesus promised to be with His Church, to be with His followers till the end of time. We can count on Him. He continues to walk by our side, lovingly caring for us, guiding us on this pilgrimage. Trust in God. He is with us.