



One of the most memorable trips I have ever been on is the first time I went to Vietnam. I was around 16 years old and this was something my mom had wanted to do for some time. When my mom had first proposed this idea to the family, to my dismay, yes dismay, and I am sure to everyone's surprise, I was completely not in favor of going to Vietnam. The reason being I had always had a "complicated" understanding of Vietnam; what I mean by this is whenever I got into a little trouble or took things for granted my parents had always threatened me with sending me back to Vietnam in order to appreciate everything that I have here in the United States. For this, it developed in me an unenthusiastic and not very cordial perspective of my parents' motherland. So, when the time had come for our family to make that trip, unfortunately, I made it my mission to make my parents understand I did *not* want to go on this trip. I will just say in short, I was a complete brat in carrying this forward. But, to my very own surprise, things changed once I set foot on the land in which my parents were born and where my heritage came from. My heart was softened and my spirit converted.

I truly felt love and belonging. This is not to say I did not experience this at home, but being in Vietnam, enhanced this feeling of being "home away from home." It was the most surreal experience. Though my Vietnamese was shaky at best, I truly felt a familial and familiar sense of belonging. What grew in me as well, after visiting many different landmarks, such as, Saigon, Saigon's Notre Dame Cathedral, Mui Ne, Hoi An, Hue, and many more, was a deep appreciation for my heritage, culture, and bloodline.

When I came home from this trip I was inspired to learn more about my culture, which in my mind meant to learn the language (and food). I was enrolled in Viet Ngu (a Vietnamese Language Program) at St. Nicholas Catholic Church when I was about 8 years old, but I never took it seriously until this trip with my family; and even more so, when I became more involved with Thieu Nhi Thanh The (the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Society) and my vocational call to the priesthood 4 years later.

I attribute a lot of my Vietnamese fluency to the Viet Ngu program at St. Nicholas Church and even more so to my parents, but most of all, to God who created such a diverse world for us to witness and learn from. For this I thank you.

I pray that our younger generation can reflect deeper to be able to see the beauty of our culture that has been handed down to us through our parents and ancestors with the hope that we can be able to hand that down to our children.

May God bless you and keep you always. And may Mother Mary continue to nurture you all towards her beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Yours truly,

Father Brandon Long Dang

