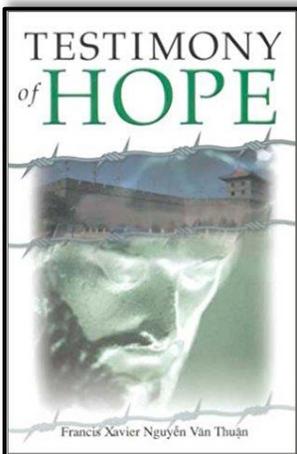




## Scandalized and Embarrassed?



Saint John Paul II told Francis Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận to publish the meditations he presented to the Roman Curia during the first year of the Third Millennium. In the opening pages of that publication (Testimony of Hope) Venerable Thuận addresses the “book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” (Saint Matthew 1:1), and in so doing, gives “post Charlottesville America” food for thought regarding embarrassing and perhaps even scandalous members of the American family.

“If we consider the names of the kings” writes Thuận, “in the ‘book of the genealogy of Jesus,’ we realize that before the exile only two of the kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, were faithful to God. The others were idolaters, assassins, and people without morals ... Even among the many kings mentioned in the post-exilic period, we find only two who remained faithful to the Lord: Shealtiel and Zerubbabel. The others are obscure figures or sinners.

In David – the most famous of the kings from whom the Messiah received His human origins – both sin and sanctity are mixed. With bitter tears, David confessed his sins of adultery and murder in the Psalms, especially in Psalm 50, which became the penitential prayer often used in the Liturgy of the Church.

In the beginning of Saint Matthew’s Gospel, even the women named as the mothers who gave life from the womb of God’s blessing, arouse in us a certain emotion. They are all women who find themselves in strange situations. Tamar is a sinner, Rahab a prostitute, Ruth a foreigner. The Gospel does not even dare to name the fourth woman; she is simply “the wife of Uriah.” Of course, this refers to Bathsheba.

Yet, the river of history, full of sinners and criminals, becomes a source of pure water as we approach the fullness of time. With Mary the mother of Jesus the Messiah, all generations will be renewed. This list of sinners’ names presented by Saint Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus does not scandalize us. Rather, it exalts the mystery of God’s mercy. Even Jesus chose Peter who denied Him and Paul who persecuted Him. Nevertheless, they are still the pillars of the Church. If a people were to write their official history, they would certainly speak of victories, of heroes, of their greatness ... It would be a unique case, admirable and stupendous indeed, to find a people who would not hide the sins of their ancestors in an official history.” (Francis Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Testimony of Hope)

Let us pause and reflect on these words in the aftermath of what Saint John Paul II might have called “another dark day in the history of humanity” ... and now let us read on.

“Soldiers! Let us humble ourselves before the Lord, our God, asking through Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, beseeching the aid of the God of our forefathers in the defense of our homes and our liberties, thanking Him for His past blessings, and imploring their continuance upon our cause and our people.”

In light of the recent events in Charlottesville, anyone and everyone reading those words should and would I am sure, take them to heart and employ them at once. “Knowing”, as their author knew when he penned them, and even knowing who authored them (General Robert E. Lee) “that intercessory prayer is our mightiest weapon and the supreme call for all Christians today, I pleadingly urge our people everywhere to pray. Believing that prayer is the greatest contribution that our people can make in this critical hour, I humbly urge that we take time to pray - to really pray. Let there be prayer at sunup, at noonday, at sundown, at midnight - all through the day. Let us pray for our children, our youth, our aged, our pastors, our homes. Let us pray for the churches. Let us pray for ourselves, that we may not lose the word ‘concern’ out of our Christian vocabulary. Let us pray for our nation. Let us pray for those who have never known Jesus Christ and His redeeming love, for moral forces everywhere, for our national leaders. Let prayer be our passion. Let prayer be our practice.”