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## **Church mourns Fr. Matthew, superior, and "soul" of the Redemptorists in Hanoi**

05 March 2016

He died at age 76 on the evening of 2 March. He was a member of the congregation for 53 years and a priest for 46. Under his leadership, the Redemptorists have brought support to the marginalized and the poorest in Vietnam. According to the faithful, his was a cry in the wilderness: "Even if society does not change - he said - we change as does our awareness of our responsibility."



Hanoi (AsiaNews) - The Vietnamese Catholic Church is mourning the death of Fr. Matthew Vu Khoi Phung, former superior of the

Redemptorists in Hanoi, who died on March 2 at the age of 76 years. The priest, for 53 years within the congregation and a priest for 46, has devoted his life to the mission of the Redemptorists among the poorer sections of society in Vietnam, accepting the task, as he himself wrote, "to serve God in the poor and abandoned. "

Fr. Joseph Ngô Văn Kha celebrated the funeral in the monastery of Hanoi. "Fr. Matthew was a humble and wise person - he said - he was both a father and a teacher for the new generations of Redemptorists of Vietnam, who follow his teachings and his example. "

His brothers say Fr. Matthew has always had at heart the fate of Vietnam and its people. In a sermon he urged the faithful to "pray for peace and truth in our country. I am convinced - he said - that we have the power of faith, that we are ready to accept the sacrifice, suffering, beatings and many other methods of repression. Why? Because we have discovered that we possess not only our own strength but also the word of Jesus and his love for us. If we follow him joyfully on the path that he shows us we will reap great fruits".

In his parish of Thai Ha in Hanoi, Fr. Matthew always had lighted candles: "We must pray for our country in these dangerous circumstances, with faith and love." Many believers describe his activities as a cry in the wilderness: "In our society values are ignored, the human person and his dignity is not respected according to God's will".

To those who asked what was the use of prayer in Vietnam, where the situation for Christians remains the same and tends to get worse if anything, the priest replied: " Even if society does not change we change as does our awareness of our responsibility. Thanks to our prayers God has done much for His people. "

Since their arrival in Vietnam in 1921, the Redemptorists have been active in proclaiming the

Gospel and in society, working on behalf of the poor and marginalized, all of this despite the attacks and the restrictions imposed by the government in Hanoi. Following Pope Francis, according to whom "the faith and the poor are two inseparable entities", the religious have taken to heart especially the needy and the destitute of society.

The congregation has always been critical of the government and has been harassed for years by police and thugs, with arrests, threats and requisition of land. The Redemptorists, however, fearlessly continue their mission.

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