

The Background of My Farewell-to-Life Trip

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Translated by Purple Kwong

After detailed examinations, I was finally diagnosed as having “lung adenocarcinoma”. That was a shock to me; it was the same as sentencing me to death. Last year three of my good friends died of this cancer. The first one was Father Peter Liu, SJ. We were in the novitiate at the same time, and we studied in the same class when we entered the Society of Jesus. He died within a month after he was diagnosed. Another close friend of mine who died of this cancer was Dr. Chiang, the former Dean of the Tuberculosis and Chest Department of Cardinal Tian Hospital. He died at the age of 57. The third person was Msgr. Peter Chi, CM. He had been an assistant of my predecessor, the Most Rev. Archbishop Joseph Cheng, OP, and had also been my Vicar General when I was Bishop of the Kaohsiung Diocese. Although there has been tremendous advancement in the medical field, and there are drugs that can suppress the deterioration of the illness, and prolong the life of the patient, up to now there is still no drug that can cure lung adenocarcinoma. This terminal illness disrupted my plan of spending a leisurely relaxed life in my old age. I dared not blame God, but I was reluctant to accept this illness. My instant response was: “Why me?! I don’t smoke nor drink, why me?”

I pray regularly; but when I am confronted with an extraordinary issue, I would calm down and seek the light of God to help me see His will. I prayed to God, asking Him to grant me His wisdom and strength so that I could act according to His will. After praying for half-an-hour, I became peaceful and I asked in turn: “Why not me? Why must it be someone else that has terminal illness? What special right do I possess that I shouldn’t have cancer?” At the same time I asked God to show me His will. Deep within me the voice of God became clearer and clearer: “I will use you — an old and ill useless fellow — to witness to my great love! You will sow the seeds of the Gospel all over Taiwan!” This voice grew stronger and stronger in me, and I could not get rid of it. I

reflected in my prayer, and gradually I understood that through this lung adenocarcinoma, God has given me my final mission on earth. I decided to start my Farewell-to-Life Trip, going to different places in Taiwan to proclaim the love of God and to bear witness to the Gospel. This was the only work I could do in my old age, for the glory of God and for the salvation of humankind.

I planned to go to the seven dioceses on Taiwan for this Farewell Trip. But first I had to get the consent of all their bishops. For this, when the bishops met for their Spring conference in 2007, I asked a bishop to help me to seek their opinion. They welcomed my idea of a Farewell Trip to the different dioceses to proclaim God's love, but they hoped that I would discard the name Farewell-to-Life Trip, which sounded too sad. After prayer and reflection, I insisted on retaining this name because it communicates a Christian's viewpoint of the stages in life from womb to tomb, and the meaning of life. It also enables non-Christians to have a better understanding of our Christian belief.

The Farewell-to-Life Trip began in August 2007. Catholic Sanipax Socio-Medical Service & Education Foundation invited me to their program "LOVE at the Turning Point in Life," for whom I made four talks in Taipei, Taichung, Kaohsiung and Taitung respectively. Because of the media coverage, numerous invitations came from all directions. Due to limitations of both time and health, I had to make a choice. From August to December in 2007, God had made use of this old and sick useless fellow to conduct some fifty large-scale talks to bear witness to His love; each time there were an average of about 1,000 persons in the audience. Less than 10 percent of the audience was Christian (Catholics and Protestants). Each talk lasted about 2 hours, during which I sowed the seeds of the core of our Christian faith — God is Love — into the hearts of the audience. A total of at least 50,000 people have heard my witness. In addition to these talks, there was coverage on television, radio, newspapers, magazines and other media, which means that the message of God's love has directly or indirectly reached millions of people through my Trip, and they would come to know the good news that out of love God has created this world and redeemed all men and women. Details of the themes and my targeted audience for my Farewell-to-Life Trip will be covered in another article.