

## **It is difficult for us to cry in front of such a big smile**

(homily pronounced on August 3rd, 2011 by Fr. Fernando Azpiroz during Fr. Ruiz' memorial Mass )

The first time I met Fr. Ruiz was six years ago. That evening, he was in his room fixing a pair of pants. He then told me a story: "Fifty years ago, Macau was very poor. Myself, I only had two pair of pants. Everyday I washed one, and I used the other one. One morning I discovered that somebody had taken away one of my pair of pants. I went around Macau and told everyone: I need that pair of pants back so I can continue working for you. That afternoon, I recovered my pair of pants"

That was one of Fr. Ruiz' principles. Whatever you have received from God is not for yourself, but it is to be given, including your own joy. Because **the more you give, the more you have**. "Nothing happier that to make people happy". Fr. Ruiz learnt by heart what Christ showed to Him in every Mass he celebrated since he was ordained a priest: Our life is not for us to be kept, Our life is to be given and shared with our brothers and sisters

In 1950 Fr. Ruiz came from China to Macau. He was not alone. Thousands of people were escaping like him. Many were sick, alone, jobless, hungry, with children to feed, etc. Fr. Ruiz himself was also sick and poor, just arrived in a new place where he did not speak the language. But at least he had a community to support him, a little house to live, he had some friends who can help him get some food to share. He immediately put these things to move to serve those in need. He had no big plans, he didn't think about tomorrow. He didn't start to think about the thousands of people he would have to feed. Just step by step, he started doing simple things. Just fed those who came first to his house. And fed not only their stomachs, but their hearts. To do so, he decided to reopen the old St. Agustin Church. His goal: make them feel happy, let them gather together, form community, pray together, sing together. Many of you were there at that time. That was also the beginning of the now very famous "Perosi choir", which today is singing in this Requiem Mass for Fr. Ruiz.

Fr. Ruiz realized that no matter how much rice he gave to those in need, there was always enough rice to give. It was at that time that God started to teach him a very important lesson: "**Just rely on Me, not on yourself**". Fr. Ruiz never forgot that lesson, no matter how big or small were the problems or challenges he had to face. He also learnt that to rely on God means also to learn **to rely on people**, on his friends. He realized that **everybody has a desire to help others**, no matter how poor he or she is, provided you give them an opportunity to do so. He became a specialist in looking for friends and collaborators. Among them, the St. Ana sisters and the sisters who work in the different Casa Ricci centers in China occupied a very special place in Fr. Ruiz' heart.

In this simple way, Fr. Ruiz accompanied the Macau people throughout a very difficult and special moment of their history and lives. He just used the pure and simple LOVE of the Gospel to build solid social stability.

During his years in Macau, the Lord taught Fr. Ruiz another important lesson. That is today's Gospel. Keep your heart always open to those who come to you. Don't judge. Don't ask for an "entrance ticket". Don't ask for "passports" or for "political identities". Don't make people wait. Everybody should be welcomed and received. Fr. Ruiz' heart was always open to everybody, because **he knew that Jesus visits us in each person who is in need**. Sometimes he had to pay a big price for this attitude: In the early 1990s he helped a student who participated in the Tiananmen square movement (天安门六四事件).

The government was not happy. For two years he was unable to get a visa to enter in China. It was a painful moment for him. But he was willing to pay that price.

But Fr. Ruiz was not sitting idle waiting for Jesus to come to him. **He went to look for Him.** He had done that in Macau. He also did it in China. In the mid eighties, and at his late seventies, the Lord prepared Fr. Ruiz to start another very important mission. Through and old priest, Fr. Ruiz discovered Jesus, forgotten and sick in a very remote island in Guangdong province: Tajin island. That was his first contact with leprosy affected people in China. That moment impressed him for the rest of his life. He decided not to leave Jesus alone, waiting there anymore. It was the beginning of his work for leprosy affected people that would take Fr. Ruiz to the most remote and forgotten places in China. 140 leprosy rehabilitation communities would receive Fr. Ruiz. He became their best friend. They became his best friends. He gave a lot to them, but he also received a lot from them as well. His big smile opened their hearts. Their big smiles opened Fr. Ruiz' heart. For Fr. Ruiz, God's love was not only about learning to give, it was also about learning how to receive.

Following his experience in Macau, he looked for companions to help him in this new and challenging mission. In less than 10 years time, more than 90 Sisters decided to leave their places and communities to go to live with the leprosy affected people. Ten years later, the same happened with the AIDS infected and affected people in China he would invite these sisters to serve.

Taxi drivers know a lot about their cities. Once a taxi driver in Macau told me that Fr. Ruiz is Macau's angel. In the Bible, every angel has a special characteristic according to his or her mission. I think that Fr. Ruiz is a smiling angel. Angels' mission is to reveal the presence of God, they are His messengers. But, like Gabriel with Mary, once they deliver their message, once their mission is accomplished, they have to leave to let God himself stay with us. Fr. Ruiz' mission is accomplished. He has to leave us to allow God himself stay with us. But God has given now to Him a new and more important mission. Because today, we are not here to say goodbye to a friend. We are here together to celebrate the birth of a new saint. A saint that will intercede for us in Heaven. A smiling saint, who is very close to us, and now, very close to God. This is the faith of our Church.

Finally, I would like to finish my homily using a prayer that Fr. Ruiz used to pray everyday: The Suscipe or Ignatian offering

Lord, take and receive all my liberty  
my memory, my understanding, and my entire will  
all that I have and possess

You have given all to me  
to you, Lord, I return it.

All is yours  
do with it what you will

Give me only your love  
and your grace  
that is enough for me,