

My Vocation and Experiences in Taiwan and Hong Kong

Speaker: Rev. Fr. Michael J. Sloboda

The Guest Speaker Rev. Fr. Michael J. Sloboda MM, Assistant Parish Priest at the Rosary Church was briefly introduced by Rev. Fr. John B. Tsang as follows:-

- He was born in St. Louis, Missouri. B.S. in Physics in May 1975. Worked in electronics for two years before entering Maryknoll novitiate in September 1977.
- He was ordained priest on June 8, 1985.
- He arrived Hong Kong on August 15, 1991 and was assigned to two diverse jobs: Associate Pastor of an international parish, St. Anne's under Fr. Elmer Wurth, and Researcher at the Holy Spirit Study Centre, concerned with the Church in China.
- He returned to the US in 1998 and returned to Hong Kong in December 2004 where he was assigned various posts.
- In May 2010, he began a 3-year term as First Assistant to the Hong Kong China Local Group.
- At the end of 2011, he resigned from his work at the Holy Spirit Study Centre to become Supervisor of the Maryknoll Fathers' School in Kowloon.
- He joined Rosary Church as assistant pastor in November 2012.

Rev. Fr. Michael J. Sloboda spoke on the topic "My Vocation and Experiences in Taiwan and Hong Kong".

(A) Family Background

Rev. Fr. Michael J. Sloboda's ancestry is from Croatia in Eastern Europe. "Sloboda" means "freedom" - and the family name indicates that his ancestor was granted freedom from slavery and became peasants. (Same as the surname Freeman in U.S.A. means "Free Man").

He was given a telescope for his birthday at age 10, and so he wanted to be an astronaut as a child. This was not possible due to his poor eye sight. He studied Physics and received his B.Sc. in Physics in May 1975 and worked in electronics for two years before entering the Maryknoll novitiate.

He was greatly influenced by Rev. Fr. William Lyons MM, the chaplain of the Newman Club in campus, who always claimed that the "best vacation is vocation". Fr. Lyons also believed that "a good homily and exemplary life promotes Vocation".

He was attracted to the priesthood because he felt that the problems in the world are so great that only the Son of God can bear this weight.

(B) Experience in Taiwan

While he was in Taiwan, he studied the history of China and was fascinated by 洪秀全 and 太平天國. Between 1851-1864, the various rebellions against the Ching Dynasty resulted in the death of 16 million people, more than this total number killed during World War II.

He was once asked by a child in Taiwan “Is Taiwan good or is the U.S.A. better?” Before he could come up with a diplomatic answer, another child butted in and said “Is your father good or is your mother better?”

(C) Experience in Hong Kong

Rev. Fr. Sloboda was assigned to Hong Kong on August 15, 1991. It was supposed to be a temporary post for 6 months to help Rector Elmer Wurth in St. Anne’s Church. He returned to the U.S.A. in 1998 because of his mother’s failing health. He was assigned also to raise money for the Maryknoll Mission. When leaving Hong Kong in 1998, he jokingly told Bishop John Tong that if he was successful in raising money for the Maryknoll Mission, he would be assigned to the U.S.A. permanently; and if he was not successful in raising money, he would be re-assign to Hong Kong. Bishop John Tong then told him: I wish you will not be able to raise one cent for the Maryknoll Mission, and then you will be re-assign to Hong Kong.” This was to be the case, and he was re-assigned to Hong Kong in December 2004 and remained here since.

Rev. Fr. Michael Sloboda’s favorite sayings are:-

- (i) 7 days without prayer makes one weak (not week)
- (ii) I can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar