

## Invisible Responsibility

Father Paul Htut remembers the joy of growing up in a devout Catholic family in Myanmar, but those memories are inseparable from the fear and instability caused by decades of authoritarian rule.

“I grew up in a society marked by fear: fear of authority and instability, fear of what might happen next,” said Father Htut, who has served as parochial vicar of Risen Christ Parish in Denver since arriving in the U.S. in 2022. “I witnessed corruption, abuse of power and people losing their homes. The system was meant to keep people poor and uneducated so that those in power could remain in control.”

Although Myanmar is predominantly Buddhist, Catholics — about 1% of the population — have also suffered greatly under military dictatorships.

“There are numerous examples of churches being bombed, even as they housed people seeking refuge,” Father Htut recalled. “A priest friend of mine was stabbed and beheaded because he spoke up for the poor.”

As a priest, Father Htut saw his mission not as political but pastoral. He had to protect those under his care, speaking and bearing witness to the truth, even if it led to persecution. As tensions escalated, he accepted an invitation from the Archdiocese of Denver to serve the growing Burmese Catholic community in Colorado.

“When I arrived, I realized how blessed America is,” he said. “It has freedom of speech and a secure life. Here you can worship freely.”

As the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary, Father Htut believes that it is essential for people to understand the true meaning of freedom and how to use it properly.

“Freedom is a blessing and a gift, but also a responsibility and a calling. It is not the freedom to do what we want, but the freedom to choose what is good and true, what leads us closer to God. A nation remains strong not only by protecting freedom, but by using it wisely, by not abusing it,” he said. “Freedom is fragile and can become invisible for generations that didn’t have to shed their blood for it. But the most important part is that it should be God-centered. If freedom is guided by God’s love, it becomes something beautiful; without it, it becomes empty.”



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FATHER PAUL HTUT



ABOVE: Father Htut baptizes a newborn baby during a missionary pastoral visit to a remote village in 2020.



**LEFT:** Father Htut visits families during missionary outreach to villages.

**BELOW:** Ministry to remote communities across Myanmar.



### MYANMAR

Myanmar has endured nearly 80 years of political strife and armed conflict. It has been marked by periods of military dictatorships and civil wars. Violence and the crackdown on political opponents and civilians have contributed to social instability and a deep humanitarian crisis, with millions of people displaced both internally and externally. ►



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