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VATICAN-CHINA

A Chinese nun among youth at Synod

by Bernardo Cervellera

Sister Teresina Cheng was invited as an auditor. From her work experience in an office she decided to dedicate her life to the youth of China, marked by loneliness, distance of parents, by worries for the future. "For young Chinese the term 'faith' is abstract ... their most real and beautiful desires are almost buried in their hearts".



Vatican City (AsiaNews) - *Her name is Sister Teresina Cheng, she is 30 years old and is one of the auditors at the Synod on Youth, which begins today. She was the only Chinese present, until the announcement that two bishops would come from China.*

Sister Teresina entered a Hebei convent in 2004. She has not yet made her perpetual profession, but after an experience of working in an office, she has one thing clear: she wants to dedicate her life to

helping young Chinese people, marked by loneliness, distance of parents, from worries about the future. Here is the interview she gave to AsiaNews.

Sister Teresina, how was your vocation born?

I started attending church. Listening to the priest during his homilies, I did not understand much of what he was saying, but my heart was happy. Then I thought to myself: If I become a nun, I will have the opportunity to participate in Mass every day. With this thought in mind, I began to attend vocational groups. So in 2004 I entered my congregation. I really liked community life. But since I was very young and had not attended high school, my congregation invited me to attend school outside. After three years I returned to the convent, but I realized how I was no longer used to living in community. So I asked to do a work experience outside the convent. During the working period, sharing life with my colleagues, all young people, I realized how much these young people really needed help. I told myself that I would have dedicated my life to helping young people. Six months later I returned to the community and I continued on my journey towards final vows.

What is life like for young Chinese people?

Today's society seems to be less secure and stable than it used to be. Many young people live in a constant state of worry and fear. Their parents work constantly: many of them are away from home all year long for work, and ignore the real needs of their children. Without the presence of parents, the most important thing in the lives of young people is material goods, money, and online friendships. Young people also have a lot of pressure regarding work; there is a lot of competition between them. The rapid development of the virtual world means that many young people depend on the internet: a perfect world, where you can live the life you want, but avoiding facing the real reality, the true self. The Internet becomes a shelter from the inner solitude and the confusion of real life.

Everyone in the world is eager for social harmony and peace. Young Chinese are no exception, but sometimes they do not seem to know how to achieve these goals. Often, following the crowd, their most true and beautiful desires remain almost buried in their hearts, vague, unknown. Young people are hungry and eager for the company of mature adults, good and authentic guides; they are very creative, able to take on their responsibilities, including sacrifices. Young people are eager to be tolerated, accepted, encouraged and recognized by society.

How is religious faith seen among young people?

For young Chinese the term "faith" is abstract. At most, their faith is what they have received from their parents. But their personal relationship with God is not profound. In China, then, the percentage of faithful belonging to the Catholic Church is very low. For example, in universities, young Catholics are afraid of revealing themselves as such, for fear of being considered "strange" or a minority. So however it is difficult to maintain a solid faith, which is in danger of fading. Certainly there are also young people interested in the Christian life, who on their own initiative come to ask to know the Church better, attend the catechumenate and activities in the parishes. A beautiful and comforting

thing is that during the holidays some young people invite the sisters to participate and conduct their spiritual retreats. But these cases are not very frequent.