

Saint Francis Xavier, Pray For Us!

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St. Francis Xavier, patron of all missions of the Catholic Church, was born on April 7, 1506. This year marks the 5th centenary of the birth of this great saint. The author prays for the Church in China through the intercession of St. Francis, who had the ardent desire of entering China. He died in 1552, his wish unfulfilled.

During the nine days of mourning following the burial of the late Pope John Paul II, I gave five talks in Chinese on Vatican Radio reporting my memories of him. The topic for the first talk was "Recollection and Commemoration." I presented an article written by an Italian journalist entitled "Wojtyla's Long Journey Towards China." This article came right to the point and said, "The Pope's greatest desires were to visit Russia and China." It then described nine stages on the Pope's long journey towards China. One stage was the "two symbolic incidents," which referred to the consecration of bishops in Beijing on January 6, 2000 and the canonization of the Chinese martyrs at the Vatican on October 1, 2000. These two incidents led to the breakdown of Sino-Vatican dialogue.

On October 24, 2001, there was a symposium at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Matteo Ricci in Beijing. In his talk the Pope addressed the following: "From the Rites Controversy to Collusion with Colonialism," "The Pope Seeking Help from Matteo Ricci," and "The Pope's Willingness to Re-establish Diplomatic

Relations.” The Holy Father apologized for mistakes the Church had committed in China in the past, and expressed the Holy See’s willingness to resume dialogue with China. This was John Paul II’s final address to China during his 26 years as Pope. The narrative of “Wojtyla’s long journey” ended here. I concluded by saying:

Wojtyla the Pope has now left us. As we read this essay again, we cannot help feeling sad and sorry for our loss. How we wish that our beloved Pope John Paul II could have imitated St. Francis Xavier, who set foot on China’s Sancian Island, and may his successor resemble Matteo Ricci by entering Beijing, the capital!

In the past, Fr. Ricci accomplished the unfulfilled wish of St. Francis Xavier. Today, will Pope Benedict XVI be able to realize what Pope John Paul II had hoped to achieve before he died? This is my motive for writing this article, “St. Francis Xavier, Pray For Us!” an essay which first recalls the late pope’s journey, and then sketches the road ahead the new pope.

The Path Along Which Pope John Paul II Traveled

Many people remember how the pope longed to visit China, and how he felt regret that his wish did not come true. Few people noticed his contributions to the Church in China over the course of 26 years. I have emphasized this positive aspect in my five commemorative talks in Chinese on Vatican Radio.

1.) Reconciliation and unity for the Church in China

The first contribution of the late Pope to the Church in Mainland China was reconciliation and unity. I remember on December 3, 1996, the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, the Pope invited a group of Chinese Catholics living in Rome to attend Mass in his private chapel. During the Mass, he said that through the Catholics present, he hoped “to have an intimate conversation with the bishops, priests, men and women religious, and the many lay faithful living in Mainland China,” and to discuss with them “some

thoughts, hopes, and wishes.” Expressing his specific wishes for the bishops, he said:

You, dear brothers in the Episcopacy who lead with courage and apostolic dedication the Catholic community in China, are called today, in a particular way, to express and promote full reconciliation among all the faithful. You are men of communion—perfect communion with God, which is shown in prayer and in daily life; and clear, unambiguous communion with the Universal Church, with the whole Episcopal College and its Head. You will carry in your hearts a passion for the unity of the Church, so as to contribute with humility and charity to the reconciliation of all, pastors and faithful. This will be possible to the extent that you can undertake a dialogue in truth and charity also with those who, as a consequence of serious and persistent difficulties, have strayed—in certain aspects—from the fullness of Catholic truth. Jesus’ prayer will be your prayer: “Father, ...that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (Jn. 17:21)

The late Pope did not limit himself to one occasion only when encouraging the Mainland Church to reconcile and to be united. Prior to this, when he was in Manila for the Tenth World Youth Day [January 1995], he conveyed his sincerest greetings to Mainland Catholics through the local organization of overseas Chinese. He not only praised the Mainlanders for giving outstanding witness to Christ, but also he encouraged them, in these words:

Your witness will be all the more eloquent if it is expressed in words and deeds of love. Jesus said so: ‘By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ (Jn. 13:35) Love among yourselves, first of all, but love also for all your Chinese brothers and sisters: a love which consists of understanding, respect, forbearing, forgiveness and reconciliation within the Christian community; a love which involves service, self-sacrifice, fidelity, hard work, honesty and justice in society as a whole.¹

¹ *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 159-160.

What is worth noting is that in this talk, when the Pope promoted reconciliation and unity, he added an important footnote, saying:

Unity is not the result of human policies or hidden and mysterious intentions. Instead, unity springs from conversion of the heart, and from sincere acceptance of the unchanging principles laid down by Christ for his Church. Particularly important among these principles is the effective communion of all the parts of the Church with her visible foundation—Peter, the Rock. Consequently, a Catholic who wishes to remain such and to be recognized as such cannot reject the principle of communion with the Successor of Peter.²

Later, on the eve of the Second Millennium, he issued his pastoral letter, “And The Word Was Made Flesh,” and explained to our brothers and sisters within China the true meaning of crossing the threshold of the Holy Door in the Great Jubilee Year:

For very many Catholics around the world it will not be possible to pass through the Holy Door in Rome and to venerate the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Nevertheless, wherever they live, all are invited to realize that ‘to pass through that door means to confess that Jesus is Lord; it is to strengthen faith in him in order to live the new life which he has given us. It is a decision which presumes freedom to choose, and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life (cf. Mt. 13:44-46).³

At the same time, he spoke once more about reconciliation and unity in the Mainland Church. He repeatedly urged our Chinese brothers and sisters:

In your preparation for the Great Jubilee, remember that in the Biblical tradition this moment always entails the obligation to

² Ibid., p. 160.

³ “A Letter to the Church in China: And the Word Was Made Flesh,” by John Paul II, *Tripod*, No. 115 (January-February 2000), pp. 6-7. The inner quote is from his pastoral letter, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, n. 8.

forgive one another's debt, to make satisfaction for injustices committed, and to be reconciled with one's neighbor.

You too have heard the proclamation of the 'great joy prepared for all peoples': the love and mercy of the Father, the Redemption accomplished in Christ. To the extent that you yourselves are ready to accept this joyful proclamation, you will be able to pass it on, by your lives, to the men and women around you. My ardent desire is that you will respond to the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit by forgiving one another whatever needs to be forgiven, by drawing closer to one another, by accepting one another, and by breaking down all barriers in order to overcome every possible cause of division.

Do not forget the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: 'By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (Jn. 13:35)⁴

He also attracted their attention when he said:

I rejoiced when I learned that you intend your most precious gift on the occasion of the Great Jubilee to be unity among yourselves and unity with the Successor of Peter. This intention can only be a fruit of the Spirit who guides the Church along the arduous paths of reconciliation and unity...

United among yourselves in the truth and charity of Christ, in communion with the Universal Church and with him who has been called by Jesus to be the Successor of Peter and the pledge of unity, cross the threshold of the new millennium, confident that the one God and Father of the whole human race will continue to bless your steps and those of all your people.⁵

The late pope thus instructed the Chinese Catholics with earnest words and a kind heart. If anyone says that some among us formerly doubted his wisdom, now they already know better. The following letter expresses their sentiments.

⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

April 9, 2005

April 8 was the day of Pope John Paul II's funeral. We, the underground church in the Diocese of Yongnian, Hebei, gathered in a certain church, as the still-confined Bishop Han arranged. At 3 p.m., five priests, many seminarians and Sisters, and over 500 lay people offered a Mass for the Dead for the Pope. At that hour, even though we could not visit Rome in person, yet our hearts had already flown to St. Peter's Square, and merged with those present at the papal funeral. With heavy hearts, sad, and grieving, and with white flowers pinned to our chests, we mourned silently and prayed:

"Holy Father! You have left us to return to the Heavenly Father, yet we still recall in our hearts your exhortations to us. In 1995 in Manila, during World Youth Day, you issued a message to the Church in China. In 1996, the sermon you gave during the Mass on the Feast of St. Francis Xavier has always been an encouragement and guidance for us, and is the guideline for our unity and harmony, and our fidelity to our faith and our Church.

Even though our condition is extremely difficult, yet as soon as we think of the words from the Bible which you often quoted—'Do Not Be Afraid!'—our courage and strength multiplies.

Holy Father! Please intercede for us in heaven before God: Arrange for us a new pope like yourself. Also pray for us, remember the suffering Church in China, remember your flock in the Diocese of Yongnian, and remember our good shepherd, Bishop John Han, who still sacrifices himself for his flock.

All the clergy and laity of the Diocese of Yongnian

2.) The improvement in Sino-Vatican relations

Another contribution of the late Pope John Paul II to the Church in our country was the improvement in Sino-Vatican relations. Speaking of this, I cannot help thinking of Matteo Ricci and the two international symposia on him, both held at the Gregorian University in Rome. The first was held in 1982 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Ricci's arrival in China, and the second in 2001 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of his

entry into Beijing. The Pope took both opportunities to deliver important speeches regarding China.

In his first address [October 25, 1982], the Pope elucidated Ricci's advance mission methods. He went on to express hope in overturning the long-time estrangement between the Holy See and the Chinese government. He was determined to seek to eliminate obstacles and to resume dialogue:

We may have confidence that the obstacles can be leveled, and that an appropriate method and the adequate structures for resuming dialogue will be found and will be kept constantly open. In this way, all Chinese believers can feel at ease whether in the national community or in the Church. We are certain that this will likewise redound to the advantage of the whole Chinese nation which the Church profoundly esteems and loves.⁶

This address had produced the expected result. In the following years, Sino-Vatican relations gradually improved. On August 20, 1993, Dr. Joaquin Navarro, the Director of the Holy See Press Office, answered reporters' questions by saying:

Indirect contacts between China and the Holy See have been going on for a long time, and more frequent in recent years. The Holy See takes full notice of the willingness expressed by the authorities in Beijing for the normalization of Sino-Vatican relations.

On February 11, 1999, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican Secretary of State, announced to the press corps covering the Vatican:

If it were only possible, the embassy of the Holy See would be relocated to Beijing tonight, no need to wait until tomorrow.

Yet in the Great Jubilee Year 2000, because Beijing took it on itself to consecrate five bishops without authorization, and because of the Vatican canonizations on October 1, Sino-Vatican

⁶ "Pope's address on the work of Father Ricci in China," *Tripod*, No. 12, (December 1982), pp. 71-72.

dialogue came to an abrupt halt. Pope John Paul II delivered his second address at the Gregorian University after these incidents had occurred. In this speech, the Pope emphasized the deep appreciation of Fr. Ricci for Chinese civilization and tradition, and pointed out how all Ricci's plans for mission rested on those two pillars. The Pope apologized for the mistakes the Church had committed in China throughout history. He expressed the willingness of the Holy See to resume dialogue with China:

It is no secret that the Holy See, in the name of the whole Catholic Church, and, I believe, for the benefit of the whole human family, hopes for the opening of some form of dialogue with the authorities of the People's Republic of China. Once misunderstandings of the past have been overcome, such a dialogue would make it possible for us to work together for the good of the Chinese people and for peace in the world. The present moment of profound disquiet in the international community calls for a fervent commitment on the part of everyone to creating and developing ties of understanding, friendship and solidarity among peoples. In this context, the normalization of relations between the People's Republic of China and the Holy See would undoubtedly have positive repercussions for humanity's progress.⁷

This was the last speech of Pope John Paul II on China. After his death, the Chinese government expressed its condolences, and hoped that the Roman Curia, under the new pope, could create favorable conditions for improving Sino-Vatican relations. At the same time, Liu Jianchao, a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, pointed out that the Pope had expressed his apologies for the errors committed in history by certain church personnel against the Chinese people, and also mentioned that the Vatican and Catholics in China have ties of a religious nature, which are neither harmful to the unity of the Chinese nation, nor could they weaken China's independence and sovereignty in any way. Liu considered such

⁷ "Fourth Centenary of the Arrival in Beijing of Matteo Ricci, S.J.," *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly English edition, 31 October 2001, p. 4.

expressions beneficial to the improvement of Sino-Vatican relations. Nevertheless, Liu reiterated Chinese government's two principles for establishing relations with the Vatican, namely, non-interference in China's religious affairs, and breaking ties with Taiwan.

The Path Before the New Pope

The journey taken by the late Pope John Paul II has been described above. He was a patriot. From beginning to end, he fervently loved his native country Poland, even though Poland formerly was a Communist country. For this reason, he was able to understand and empathize with the suffering of our brothers and sisters in China. This had a bearing on his striving to improve Sino-Vatican relations. After the new pope was elected, he chose the name Benedict XVI. The name signifies that Europe will be his pastoral priority. Yet this definitely does not mean that he will forget to care for our Church in China. We hope that under his guidance, the Roman Curia will achieve the unfulfilled wish of the late pope, and continue to contribute to our Chinese Church.

1.) Forget the past, look expectantly toward the future

In the past, China and the Catholic Church had disputes and even conflicts. In the second half of the last century, the Church in China was persecuted, which resulted in internal divisions, mutual struggle for power, and mutual non-acceptance. The late pope exhorted our Church in China to reconcile and be united, and he also strove vigorously to improve Sino-Vatican relations. All of this entails a spirit of forgetting the past and looking toward the future. This is an essential condition for realizing the unfulfilled wish of the late pope. It seems that the new pope will not reject it.

2.) Learn about today's China

Nevertheless, the efforts of the late pope did not succeed. One of the reasons was the mutual misunderstanding of the Beijing government and the Roman Curia. Since the expulsion of Apostolic Nuncio Antonio Riberi from China and the break in relations over

fifty years ago, China and the Vatican have undergone massive changes. The Catholic Church in China, whether official or underground, is very different from before. Under such circumstances, both the Beijing government and the Roman Curia need to discard their prejudices and come to a true understanding of each other, before they can have real dialogue. Only if this happens can there be hope for the unfulfilled wish of the last pope to be realized.

3.) *Toleration, not appeasement*

The late pope entreated the Church within our nation to reconcile and be united, and he strove to improve Sino-Vatican relations. Misunderstandings were another reason why these efforts did not fully achieve their intended effects. Some people consider that dialogue between the pope and the Chinese government, as well as accepting certain bishops of the official church, is appeasement with evil, and is against the truth. This is foolish; they do not know the difference between toleration and appeasement. The attitude of the Chinese government and the circumstances of the Church within China certainly do not accord with Church doctrine on many points. Yet to tolerate differences as the only available exit is not equivalent to casting the truth behind one's back and appeasing evil. Some people overseas regard the existence of the official church in China as a shameful compromise. However, this may precisely be the realization of the spirit of "accommodation" of the Incarnate Son of God. The new pope in his inaugural address described the duty of the Church in today's world as carrying the cross, being crucified (*crocifisso*), but not seeking to nail other people to the cross (*crocifissore*). Our Church has this same duty in China.

4.) *Salt of the earth and light of the world*

The continued existence of the Church in today's China should not be a decoration in socialist society; rather it should be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" among the

Chinese people. On the day after his installation, Pope Benedict XVI went to the Basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Wall to venerate the tomb of the Apostle of the Gentiles. At the same time he gave a speech, stressing that the essence of the Church is mission, proclaiming the Gospel to all people, giving witness to the resurrection of Christ, even to the shedding of one's blood. For our Church in China today, whether official or unofficial, these words of the new pope are really true and fair.

St. Francis Xavier, Pray for Us!

I mentioned earlier that on the feast of St. Francis Xavier in 1996, Pope John Paul II invited a group of Chinese Catholics in Rome to attend Mass in his private chapel. During Mass, he expressed his wish "to have an intimate conversation with the bishops, priests, seminarians, Sisters and laity in Mainland China" through those present. Now I pray that St. Francis Xavier, patron saint of the missions, will bless the bishops, priests, seminarians, Sisters and laity in China, that each of them will attain the hope the late pope had for them.

John Paul II's hope for the bishops was that they be men of communion:

You are men of communion: perfect communion with God, which is shown in prayer and in daily life; and clear, unambiguous communion with the Universal Church, with the whole Episcopal College and its Head. You will carry in your hearts a passion for the unity of the Church, so as to contribute with humility and charity to the reconciliation of all, pastors and faithful. This will be possible to the extent that you can undertake a dialogue in truth and charity also with those who, as a consequence of serious and persistent difficulties, have strayed—in certain aspects—from the fullness of Catholic truth. Jesus' prayer will be your prayer: "Father, ...that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (Jn. 17:21)⁸

⁸ "Message to the Church in China," *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly English edition, 11 December 1996, p. 3, n.4.

The pope's hope for priests, seminarians and Sisters is that they receive reliable formation and earnest cultivation in accordance with the Church's tradition and discipline:

In order then to make progress on the path towards the fullness of unity and to assure the future of the Catholic Church in China, one of the fundamental tasks of the bishop's ministry will be to ensure suitable and serious formation of candidates for the priesthood. In fact, it is upon their authentic theological, moral, spiritual and pastoral formation, according to the Church's tradition and discipline, that there depends in a decisive way the future of the Christian communities.

But today more than ever, and following the example of what has been done in other times, similar integral formation must be offered to men and women religious, as well as to catechists and lay people working to spread the Gospel: in this way they will also be able to give an account of their faith and of their hope before a society in need of a courageous and convinced witness to the wisdom and truth of Christ's Gospel.⁹

The pope reminded all the faithful in our country:

Today too all Chinese Catholics are called to remain loyal to the faith received and passed on, and not to yield to models of a Church which do not correspond to the will of the Lord Jesus, to the Catholic faith, or to the feelings and convictions of a great majority of Chinese Catholics. From these models would come a division capable only of causing confusion, to the detriment both of the faith itself and of the contribution which the faithful can make to their homeland as instruments of peace and social progress.¹⁰

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us!

⁹ Ibid., n. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., n. 2.