

A PILGRIM CHURCH TO BE ESTABLISHED ON OUR LADY'S KNOLL IN TAIWAN



Editor's note: A knoll dedicated to the Blessed Mother in the mountains of Taiwan is gradually becoming a famous place of pilgrimage. It is related to the return to safety of a mountain climbing team and due to the enthusiastic promotion of Father Li Shanxiu. The following is an extract of an article by Father Li which appeared in the December 4, 1986 edition of Christian Life Weekly.

Responsible government authorities have designated Wu Feng Qi as a "scenic district" and an unbroken stream of visitors flock there every day. When visitors look at the beautiful scenery, do they experience the marvelous power of the creator? Probably very few of them do! Should we church workers just sit idly by and let this happen? Or is there some action we can take?

A real opportunity has now presented itself. Before the Spring Festival in 1981 five members of a Taipei mountain climbing team went to the bishop's house to call upon Archbishop Matthew Kia. They told Archbishop Kia that on the evening of November 9, 1980, they were faced with danger as they were descending Wu Feng Qi Mountain and they implored the Blessed Mother's help. They related their experience of seeing a vision of the Blessed Mother and of how they eventually reached

safety at the bottom of the mountain. They also informed the archbishop of their plans to build a pavilion containing a commemorative marker on the mountain as a sign of their gratitude.

Father Li Shanxiu, pastor of Taipei's Ren Ai Catholic Church, was elated at the news and considered it a God-given opportunity for the church. Father Li thought that the church ought to apply to the concerned government offices for permission to establish a place of pilgrimage in honor of the Blessed Mother in Wu Feng Qi's scenic area. Such a site, Father Li felt, would be beneficial to the church, to that particular locality and to the nation as a whole, in addition to providing the mountain climbing team with an opportunity to express its gratitude. Since Father Li considered the matter urgent, he too made an appointment to see Archbishop Kia in order to discuss with him the setting up of a pilgrimage site on Wu Feng Qi Mountain. The most important points of their discussion are enumerated below.

I. The impetus to the development of church affairs provided by a place of pilgrimage

According to studies of Chinese culture, traveling to places of pilgrimage is a special characteristic of the Chinese people. From ancient times up to the present, nobles as well as common people from all over the country went off to the mountains to burn incense to the gods. This is an unbroken tradition throughout history and is the custom among the people of Taiwan even today. If a place of pilgrimage in honor of the Blessed Mother is established at Wu Feng Qi, it will arouse the interest of Catholics throughout Taiwan. If properly guided by pastoral workers this interest can become a force for strengthening the faith and spiritual life of the Catholics. Their spiritual life will develop and become more fervent.

Such a place of pilgrimage would also become a powerful instrument for preaching the Gospel. Out of curiosity visitors to the Wu Feng Qi scenic district would certainly take a tour of the pilgrimage site. A brief explanation of the Catholic religion at the pilgrimage place would give the visitors some impression of God, Jesus, Our Blessed Mother and the church. Indirectly the pilgrimage site would become an important means for spreading the faith to the non-believer.

Moreover, many years ago a Swiss Brother from Lotung Hospital built a small wooden hut on the top of Wu Feng Qi. He placed a statue of the Blessed Mother in front of it and erected a large cross on the cliff to the right of the hut. He called the place "Our Lady's Knoll," and its

purpose was to serve as a place of rest for mountain climbers. Many non-Christian mountaineers have used the hut at Our Lady's Knoll to rest or to spend the night. They are very grateful to the Swiss Brother. At the same time a good feeling towards Mary and towards the Catholic religion has been created in them. The small hut at Our Lady's Knoll, when linked spiritually with the pilgrimage site at the foot of the mountain, will have an even greater effect on our work of evangelization.

II. The contribution of the pilgrimage site to Jiaoxi (the local town) and to the whole country

It is proposed that the pilgrimage site be erected near the waterfall at Wu Feng Qi. If all the plans for the pilgrimage site are carried out properly, then Catholics from all over Taiwan will certainly want to organize groups to go there on pilgrimage. I also think that overseas Chinese Catholics from such places as Hong Kong and southeast Asia will also want to organize pilgrimage groups.

At the same time, mention should perhaps be made of the many trips to Europe of the Catholic Church Lan Yang Dancing Troupe. Their performances have been greatly appreciated by the Catholics of those countries. Because this troupe comes from the same neighborhood as the proposed place of pilgrimage, interest will be aroused among European Catholics to go there on pilgrimage. Since large numbers of pilgrims are expected, they naturally would bring economic prosperity to the Jiaoxi area. Incomes would be increased and living standards raised. Moreover, the prayerful atmosphere of the pilgrimage site would permeate the surrounding environment. Ethical standards would be raised and the social environment would become more honest. Thus the pilgrimage site would be a great benefit to the Jiaoxi region.

Pilgrims from abroad will observe the fervent faith of our Catholics. They will also see the economic developments which have taken place on Taiwan. This will make a good impression on them. When they go back to their own countries they will relate their experiences to their fellow countrymen. Thus Our Lady's place of pilgrimage would make a great contribution to our country's foreign relations, and demonstrate how our Catholics love their country.

III. Our Blessed Mother and the five mountaineers.

Although the five mountain climbers were not Catholics, they are still children of God. When they ran into a dangerous situation as they

were descending the mountain and fear rose in their hearts, two of their number prayed before the statue of Mary at Our Lady's Knoll. After they experienced Mary's saving grace, they decided to build a pavilion in thanksgiving to her. When one receives a favor, he should return the favor. This is a natural sentiment flowing from human nature. Our ancient philosophers gave us this teaching, and it is also Catholic doctrine. Catholicism teaches us to praise God at all time for His love for us and to thank Him for His many blessings. Part of the pilgrimage site would include the thanksgiving memorial of the five mountaineers. They could return anytime to renew their pledges of gratitude to the Blessed Mother.

However, regarding the mountaineers' experience of seeing an apparition of Our Blessed Mother, because the person in the apparition did not speak to them, nor tell them who she was, nor give them a message to share with the world at large, according to church tradition such an appearance is considered a private apparition. Since it was a personal experience of the five mountaineers, they can spread the news of Mary's favor to them themselves. But church authorities will not make a public declaration concerning the authenticity of this apparition.

IV. The local bishop and the establishment of the place of pilgrimage

According to Canon Law, Archbishop Matthew Kia of Taipei has the power to purchase land at Wu Feng Qi to build the pilgrimage site which will give glory to God, benefit the church and bring blessings to many people. Due to its natural beauty, the government has declared Wu Feng Qi to be an official scenic place. Thus certain limitations could be experienced in erecting buildings because of the desire to preserve the natural beauty of the place. The church might meet many difficulties in obtaining permission to purchase land there and set up a place of pilgrimage on it. However, it is not impossible. Since a place of pilgrimage would be advantageous to both the church and the country, if the persons dealing with these matters are only patient and persevering, their efforts are certain to meet with success.

After discussing the abovementioned points with Archbishop Kia, he expressed his tentative agreement with the idea of establishing a place of pilgrimage in honor of Our Blessed Mother at Wu Feng Qi. He also entrusted responsibility for planning and implementing the project to Father Li Shanxiu. Archbishop Kia felt that the proposal would be pleasing to God and would therefore be blessed by God.