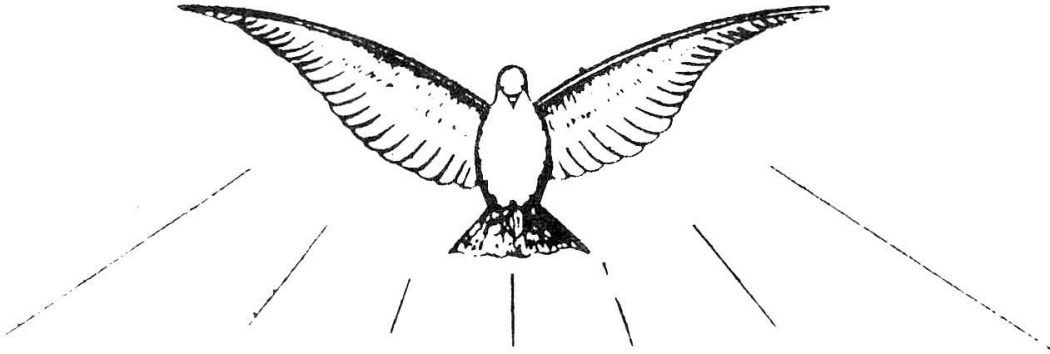


# THE SPIRIT IN CHINA



**by John Cioppa**

During Pentecost season this year, I had the opportunity to visit the Catholic Church in Yunnan Province. It was an inspiring and moving experience. As I traveled around the Province, I could sense how the Holy Spirit was truly present among the Yunnan people, two of whom especially stand out in my memory.

During my life I have met many bishops and my image of these religious leaders are of well-educated gentlemen, dressed in neatly tailored cassocks with broad red cinctures, wearing gold pectoral crosses and rings set with jewels. Many times I have sat in their offices discussing philosophy, politics, church affairs and even the faith.

In Dali, the most western diocese of Yunnan Province, I met a different kind of religious leader. Father Liu Hancheng, the 86 year old Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese was ordained in Kunming in 1933. After attending his Mass, we sat in a simple guest room where this humble man, dressed in an old black cassock and blue hat, served us tea on a table where old newspapers served as a tablecloth. Father Liu is the only priest in the entire diocese of Dali, a place which at one time had over 50 churches and chapels. Father's fading eyesight and slow movements betrayed his years, but his clear mind and dedicated spirit were captivating. When asked about the past, he referred to his own suffering and the scattering of his flock, but his eyes lit up when he spoke about the future--especially about the two seminarians who will be ordained for his diocese next year. Pain, suffering and struggle were evident, but even more evident were the deep faith, hope and love of Father Liu. I felt the Holy Spirit's strong presence there in Dali.



Sister Huang

of the area. On Sundays she meets with them for Bible sharing and prayer. It was a moving experience to be with this woman of faith whose joy and serenity reflected the presence of God in her life. She wept at our leaving. The Holy Spirit was alive and well in Shang Guan.

As I left the Diocese of Dali, words from the Scriptures passed through my mind: "If you want to be my disciple, take up your cross daily and follow me;" "I have come to bring a sword, not peace;" "Blessed are the poor, and those who suffer persecution for justice sake." I was reminded also of the great paradox of our Christian faith that God has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the strong and what appears to be foolishness to the world to confound the wise. Indeed the Spirit in Yunnan was living testimony to these truths.

The other remarkable person I met was Sister Huang Dezhen, a sister of St. Paul of Chartres who lives in Shang Guan, the town next to Dali. When I think of Sisters, I usually think of a community of women who come together for prayer and work; they are well educated, and are usually engaged in teaching or running hospitals or other forms of social work. They reflect efficiency, order and professionalism. In contrast Sister Huang, who is 84 years old and the only sister in Dali lives alone in a small village apartment. Deprived of a community, she carries out her ministry supported only by her deep faith and her memories of the past. Dressed in a simple blue suit and black cap, she greeted us warmly, delighted to have visitors from so far away. Slowly and gracefully, each day she goes out to visit the Christians