

## Personality

### *Among the Miao*

*Letters from an Elderly Priest  
translated by Norman Walling, S.J.*

Our Centre frequently receives moving letters from priests and Sisters in China, eager to share their efforts to bring the Gospel to the people. The following letters, received by Teresa Yeung, a staff member and author of a monthly supplement on China for the Hong Kong Diocesan Weekly, *Kung Kao Po*, are from a priest, who is over 70 years old, and tells of one man's endeavor to bring the Good News to the Miao People, isolated in the mountainous terrain of Yunnan Province in Southwestern China.

Father L. writes:

Dear Friend,

May Christ bless you with peace!

Thank you for your letter which came while I was in the North. I have been so busy that I have been unable to answer many letters until now. What happened is that I went to Kaiyuan to see how the repairs were coming along on the chapel there. I stayed three or four days and organized a small group consisting of two Miao catechists and four Miao young ladies. These served as readers and singers. From Kaiyuan I took the train and set out for the area bordering Vietnam. I got off the train at a station 71 kilometers from Hekou, then took a small bus, about one hour's ride, to the mountain area. It was raining when I started climbing towards my first destination, a small village, called Xiaojuzi, located on a high mountain. I spent the following two weeks climbing mountains. I had to walk all the time because the mountain trails were too narrow for horses. You can't imagine how narrow and difficult those mountain paths really are. Nor can you imagine the coarseness of the food and the primitive living conditions.

I visited seven mission stations. Each time I arrived at a location, Catholics came in from neighboring villages. I preached, heard confessions, said Mass, distributed Holy Communion, baptized, administered the Sacrament of the Sick and blessed marriages. Working in this way, I spent one or two

days in each place.

No priest had visited these areas since Mao proclaimed the People's Republic of China in 1949. Even before that a priest could only come here once every several years since the terrain is generally impassible and the trip full of formidable obstacles.

When I arrived I realized that most Catholics under 50 had never seen a priest. They had no idea what a priest might look like. They had never been to confession, never attended Mass or received Communion. The majority were baptized but they knew little about their faith. Most could not recite the Our Father or the Hail Mary. Thirty percent did not even know how to make the Sign of the Cross. Yet the depth of their faith moved me. Some of the older Catholics could not even speak; they only wept for joy at seeing a priest once again.

There are 3,000 Miao Catholics in Pingbian County in Yunnan Province. On this trip I visited about 2,650 of them either directly or indirectly. I baptized 96 persons and gave conditional baptism to 655 other persons and blessed 7 marriages.

Unfortunately, the government officials in Pingbian County are not very friendly towards the Church. Although they allowed me to do what I did, they gave me no hope that I could do more in the future. I cannot obtain their permission to build any chapels or churches and there is not one church in the entire county. Patience! We can only ask God to bless and take care of these Catholics. Please pray for them.

May you enjoy health of mind and body.  
signed/ Fr. L.

In a follow up letter he wrote:  
Dear Friend,

How are you?

Last month I sent you a letter with some photos. You must have received them by now. After my return from Pingbian I went to Jianshui County for five days. The remainder of the time I stayed home to rest and answer letters that had come in my absence.

This recent trip to Pingbian County has really taken a toll on my health. I spent 22 days altogether on this trip. At least 15 of them were spent climbing and descending mountains. As soon as

I arrived at a place, I immediately called the Catholics together. When they arrived, I preached to them, instructed them on how to go to confession and receive Holy Communion. After this I heard confessions, baptized many people, and said Mass. This kept me busy until one or two in the morning. Moreover, I was unable to sleep very well there and never really had a decent meal. Living conditions in these areas are very difficult. Furthermore, despite the good will of the people, they are so unaccustomed to having guests that they do not know what to do. I always arrived tired, dirty and thirsty, but no one thought to offer me a cup of tea or boiled water. It never occurred to them to bring some water so I could wash my face. It was only very late at night that they brought me some water to wash my feet. After fifteen days, I was actually numb. After I returned home I slept for one entire day. I had lost about six or seven kilos. My face was yellow. My cheeks were sunken. I still do not feel up to par. I lack energy. Yet tomorrow or the day after I am going to the Loping area. I'll let you know how things are there.

However, don't worry about me. I am more than 70 years old but I still want to offer whatever small services I can to the Church.

God bless you.  
signed/ Father L.



*Left: Father L. climbs the mountain to visit the Miao people.*

*Above: Father L., with a group of young Miao, pauses to rest.*