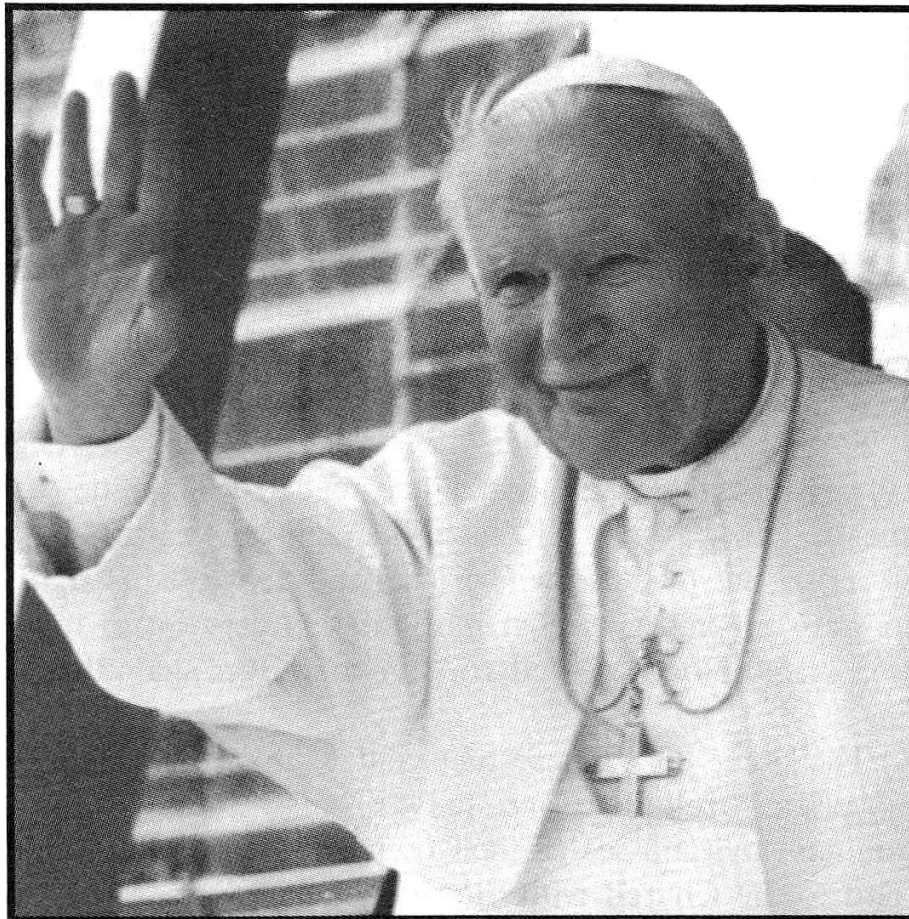


The Holy Father Speaks on the China Martyrs

Homily at the Canonization Mass

*Translated by JCS Infodoc, Brussels Belgium,
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Rome, October 1, 2000



1. "Your word is truth: consecrate us in your love (Gospel Acclamation: cf. Jn 17:17). This invocation, an echo of the prayer that Christ addressed to the Father after the Last Supper, seems to rise from the ranks of the saints and blessed, that the Spirit of God, from generation to generation, raises up in the Church.

Today, two thousand years after the Redemption, we make those words our own, as we have before us models of sanctity: Augustine Zhao Rong and 119 companions, martyrs in China, Mary

Joseph of the Heart of Jesus Sancho di Guerra, Katherine Mary Drexel and Josephine Bakhita. God the Father has "consecrated them in his love," granting the request of his Son who - to win for us a holy people – opened his arms on the cross, and by dying, destroyed death and revealed the Resurrection (cf. Eucharistic Prayer II).

To all of you, dear Brothers and Sisters, who are gathered here in such great numbers to express your devotion towards those shining witnesses of the Gospel, I extend my heartfelt greeting. 2. "The commands of the Lord give us joy" (Responsorial psalm). These words of the Responsorial Psalm reflect the experience of Augustine Zhao Rong and 119 companions, martyrs in China. The testimonies that have come down to us give us a glimpse of their state of soul marked by the deepest serenity and joy.

The Church is grateful today to her Lord, who has blessed her and fills her with the brilliant light of the holiness of these sons and daughters of China.

Is not the Holy Year the most opportune time to let their heroic witness shine forth? The young girl Anna Wang, fourteen years of age, resisted the threats of the executioner who called on her to deny her faith. Preparing herself for decapitation, she declared "The gate of Heaven is open to all," and repeated the name of Jesus three times. There was also Xi Zhuzi, the eighteen year old boy who fearlessly cried out to those who had already cut off his right arm, and who were preparing to skin him alive, "Every bit of my flesh, every drop of my blood will tell you over and over again that I am a Christian."

The other 85 Chinese men and women of every age and situation: priests, religious and laity, gave witness to the same conviction and joy, and sealed their own unwavering faithfulness to Christ, and to the Church with the gift of their lives. These events took place over several centuries during complex and difficult periods in China's history. This present celebration is not the time to pass judgments on those historical times: this could be and it should be done in other circumstances. Today, with this solemn proclamation of sainthood, the Church wishes to acknowledge that these saints are examples of courage and coherence for all of us, and an honor for the noble Chinese people.

Illustrious among this band of martyrs are also 33 missionaries, men and women, who left their own countries and endeavored to enter into the Chinese situation, taking upon

themselves in love the characteristics of that people whom they desired to serve by announcing Christ. Their tombs are there, signifying, as it were, their definitive belonging to China which, they sincerely loved, in spite of their human imitations, and for which they spent their strength. "We have not done harm to anyone," replied Bishop Francesco Fogolla to the governor who was getting ready to strike him with his own sword, "On the contrary, we have done good for many."

[At this point the Holy Father turned his attention to the three other saints being canonized. We continue with the conclusion of the homily.]

6. Dear Brothers and Sisters, animated by this time of Jubilee grace, let us renew our readiness to be profoundly purified and made holy in the Spirit. The saint, whose memorial we celebrate today, Therese of the Child Jesus, draws us along this path. Today, at the beginning of the third millennium, let us entrust the mission of the Church to her, the Patroness of the Missions, and to the new saints.

Mary, Queen of all the Saints, give support on their journey, to Christians and to all who are submissive to the Spirit of God so that the light of Christ the Savior may shine in every part of the world.

The Angelus

Sunday, October 1, 2000

Translated from the Italian by Betty Ann Maheu, MM

In his opening statement at the Angelus on Sunday, October 1, 2000, the Holy Father said,

"The saints elevated today to the glory of the altar impel us to turn our gaze towards Christ. They have lived their faith rooted in him, the Redeemer of all peoples, the only Son who is nearest to the heart of the Father, and who has made him known (cf. Jn 1,18). The saints invite us to confess him with joy, to love him wholeheartedly and to give him witness."

After speaking at some length on the Jubilee Year document, *Dominus Iesus*, the Holy Father addressed a special word of greeting to the Chinese people.

“With affection I greet all the faithful gathered here to honor the China Martyrs, especially those of you of Chinese origin, who are seeing for the first time the canonization of martyrs belonging to your own people.

“Likewise, my thoughts reach out to all the Catholic faithful in China. I know that you are spiritually united with us, and I am certain that you understand that this is a special moment of grace for the whole Church, and for the entire Catholic community in China. I wish to assure you once more that I pray for you every day. May the Holy Martyrs comfort and sustain you as, like them, you bravely and generously bear witness both to your fidelity to Jesus Christ and to the genuine love of your people.”

Discourse to the Pilgrims Gathered in Rome for the Canonizations

Translated from the Italian by Betty Ann Maheu, MM

Dearest Brothers and Sisters

1. Yesterday, in St. Peter’s Square, we experienced a special moment of joy, celebrating the canonization of several saints. Divine Providence gives us again today the opportunity to meet, and to extend our thanksgiving to God, who always gives the Church new models of evangelical life, and to deliberate together on the exemplary figures of the martyrs in China, of Maria Josefa of the Heart of Jesus, Sancho de Guerra and of Katherine Drexel.

To all of you pilgrims, who have come from various countries, I renew my greeting, together with a heartfelt word of appreciation for the inspiring atmosphere that your presence has brought to this ecclesial event.

2. I now address in a special way the pilgrims who have gathered for the canonization of 120 China martyrs. First of all, to you, the faithful of Chinese origin, with whom I wish to share the profound joy for these sons and daughters of the Chinese people who, for the first time are held up before the whole Church and the entire world for their heroic fidelity to Christ the Lord and for their nobility of soul. Yes, these are a real honor to the noble People of China.

My greatest joy is to think that all the faithful of the China Mainland are intimately united with us in this event, aware as you are—of having in the martyrs not only an example to follow, but also

intercessors with the Father. We have, in fact, the need of their help, because we are called to confront daily life with the same dedication and the same faithfulness as the martyrs demonstrated in their day.

All of you know, the majority of the 120 martyrs shed their blood at a historical moment that has a particular meaning for your people. In reality, these were dramatic situations characterized by violent social disturbances. With this canonization, the Church most certainly does not want to pass an historical judgment on those years, and still much less to legitimize some of the conduct of the governments of the time that weigh heavily on the history of the Chinese people. On the contrary, the Church wishes to show the heroic fidelity of these worthy sons and daughters of China, who did not allow themselves to be intimidated by the threats of a cruel persecution.

I am grateful for the presence of so many pilgrims from the various home countries of the 33 men and women missionaries who died in China with the faithful Chinese to whom they had announced the Gospel. There are those who, with a partial and not very objective reading of history, see only the limitations and errors of their missionary deeds. If there indeed were any—is any person free of defects—we ask for forgiveness. But today we contemplate them in glory and give thanks to God, who makes use of poor instruments for his great works of salvation. They announced the saving Word also with the gift of their life, and undertook important initiatives of human development. Be proud, you pilgrims, their fellow citizens and brothers and sisters in the faith! With their testimony, they point out to us that man is the authentic way of the Church: a way intertwined with profound and respectful intercultural dialogue, as Father Matteo Ricci has already taught, with wisdom and skill, a way substantiated with the daily offering of one's life.

[In the remainder of the discourse the Holy Father addresses comments on the other saints whom he had canonized on October 1, 2000.]