



Podcast: Our Lady of Sheshan: Praying for the Church in China, 23rd – 30th May 2021
Mgr Daniel McHugh

Journey of Faith - Life from Holy Mass - with Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh.

I can remember the days when we used to pray regularly for the conversion of Russia. There was great joy with the demise of the Soviet Union, and many said their prayers to Our Lady of Fatima were answered. Nowadays the situation in which many of our fellow Catholic Christians find themselves in China preoccupies us, and on this Pentecost Sunday Pope Francis speaking after the Regina Caeli at St Peter's said "I invite you to accompany with fervent prayer the Christian faithful in China, our dearest brothers and sisters, whom I hold in the depth of my heart. May the Holy Spirit, protagonist of the Church's mission in the world, guide them and help them to be bearers of the happy message, witness of goodness and charity, and builders of justice and peace in their country." He was speaking on the day before the 24th May Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, who is Patroness of China. This year this Feast coincides with the Feast of Our Lady Mother of the Church which has recently become part of the Calendar of the Church on the Day after Pentecost Sunday.

A major Centre of the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians in China is the Marian Shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan, on the outskirts of Shanghai. Since 2007 with Pope Benedict XVI's letter to the faithful of China, this Feast Day has been a World Day of Prayer for the Church in China. This year, Cardinal Bo, President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, has called on the Faithful to engage in a Week of Prayer for the Church and the People of China, 23rd – 30th May. Our own Bishop Declan Lang, Chair of the Bishops' International Affairs Department, is encouraging us to take up Bishop Bo's call, saying "I hope the Catholics of England and Wales may take up Cardinal Bo's call to mark this week with prayer for the Church in China, and the peoples of China, asking Our Lady of Sheshan to protect them." He goes on "This is also an important time to pray for the Chinese Community in our own countries and celebrate their important contribution to our society."

The Shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan has its origins in the 1800s when the Superior of the Jesuit Community in Shanghai purchased part of the Sheshan Mountain to build a Chapel and Retreat House. The Taiping Rebellion, the Civil War of 1850-64, was in full force and he went up the mountain and prayed to Our Lady, saying: "If the Diocese (Shanghai) is saved from the attack of the rebels, we will build a Basilica in thanksgiving for Our Lady's special protection."

On May 24th 1874, the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, Bishop Languillat presided over the laying of the cornerstone of the new Church. The Basilica on the mountain top was consecrated in 1973. And ever since Our Lady of Sheshan has been considered the

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special protector of Shanghai Diocese and China. The modern-day Shrine was constructed and dedicated in April 2000. There is a remake of the original statue; it has Mary standing erect and holding the child Jesus above her head.

The Sheshan Shrine has been a destination for visitors and prayers from all over China. But, because of the Pandemic all Pilgrimages are prohibited and hospitality to individuals and groups is also prohibited. The Diocese of Shanghai invited the faithful to pray to Our Lady from home, with the prayer composed by Benedict XVI.

Sadly, news from China regarding freedom for the Church is not good: agreements have been signed recognizing the Pope as Head of the Church, but these have not impacted at local level. It is reported that the reality is that only those acting in accord with the Regulations of the Communist Party are safe from persecution. In the last days there has been an incident where a Seminary has been closed: the Bishop and staff subjected to political sessions and brainwashing; the 10 seminarians sent home and not allowed to continue with study of Theology.

The future of the Church in mainland China and Hong Kong too should remain in our prayers to Our Lady of Sheshan.

The reading is taken from St Luke Chapter 1.

The prayer: part of the prayer composed to Our Lady of Sheshan by Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI.

*Our Lady of Sheshan, sustain all those in China,
who, amid their daily trials, continue to believe, to hope, to love.
May they never be afraid to speak of Jesus to the world,
and of the world to Jesus.
In the statue overlooking the Shrine you lift your Son on high,
offering him to the world with open arms in a gesture of love.
Help Catholics always to be credible witness to his love,
ever clinging to the rock of Peter on which the Church is built.
Mother of China and all Asia, pray for us, now and forever. Amen*

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