



Podcast: Saint Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions Feast - Let us unite in the spirit with our brothers and sisters in China, 9rd July 2021

Mgr Daniel McHugh

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

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh.

One of my special privileges as the Co-ordinator of the Diocesan Chaplaincy support for Ethnic Catholic Communities is the opportunity it gives me to learn more about the life and practice of the Faith in different countries of the world. A country that is very much in the news in these days is China, one of the greatest politically and economically. This week, on Friday 9th July we celebrate the Feast of Saint Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions, often called the Chinese Martyrs canonized in the year 2000 by Pope St John Paul II. I made contact in preparation for this Podcast with Father Joseph Liang, the Chaplain who lives in London, but comes to Birmingham to celebrate Mass monthly in their own language. Recently we have been in touch a good deal because of the issues around immigrants from Hong Kong, and the promise of the Government in the UK to admit them and offer citizenship. We have been anxious to ensure that we are aware and ready in Parishes to be welcoming, playing our part to make them at home here. You may be aware of the ongoing situation in Hong Kong, a former British Colony, which has gone back to China; some people there find the freedoms promised politically are not being honored by the Government in Beijing. Basically, without getting involved in trying to go through the complex political situation, the mainland government wants more control over local decision making. And, interestingly, from a Religious standpoint, this is the issue at this moment for the Church in China too. The Communist Party, which governs China, does not want freedom for the Church, especially in appointment of Bishops. It sees the role of the Church as impacting socially, educationally and so on. If the Church remained purely “spiritual” and did not touch the daily life and rights of people, I guess it would probably be fine!

The history of the Catholic Church in China is long and complicated going back as far as the Tang Dynasty in the 8th Century. Following, the takeover by the Communist Regime in 1949, Missionaries, like the Columban Fathers who we know well in the Birmingham Diocese, were expelled from China in 1951 and religion was vilified as an arm of western imperialism. In 1957 the Chinese Government established the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association which rejects the authority of the Holy See and appoints its own Bishops. Since 2018 however, the Pope through a provisional agreement has power to veto Bishops which the Chinese Government recommends. The Underground Catholic Church, fiercely loyal to Rome, is not happy with the agreement which they see as giving away too much to the Communist Government.

The 120 Martyrs we remember this week died for the Faith between 1648 and 1930. So, the story of the struggle to keep the Faith in China is not new. Thousands have died for

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the Faith in the last millennium. The Holy Father during the Canonization said “Chinese men and woman of every age and state, priests, religious and lay people, showed the same conviction and joy, sealing their unfailing fidelity to Christ and the Church with the gift of their lives”. 33 of them were foreign born missionaries.

Augustine Zhao Rong was the first native Chinese Priest to become a martyr. One of the more well-known native martyrs is Ann Wang aged 14 who, as she was about to be beheaded declared “the door of heaven is open to all” and repeated the name of Jesus 3 times. Another is 18-year-old Chi Zhuzi, who refused to worship idols and, before being flayed alive, pronounced to his captors, “every piece of my flesh, every drop of blood will tell you that I am a Christian.”

Fr Joseph Liang wrote to me “As Chinese Catholic migrants...we have to remember our Church in China, in which missionaries shed their blood for our land in order to let us know Jesus and hear the Gospel. Let us unite in spirit with our brothers and sisters in China. Pray for the Church in China...we always remember that it is not easy to become followers of Christ because there is still persecution for the Church somewhere in the world. But we have to stand with Christ and for Christ.”

The reading – Letter of St James 1: 2-4,12

The prayer – The Collect from the Mass of St Augustine Zhao Rong

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