

Midday Prayer - 8
27/11/67
27.11.69

Ps 116 Tape

During November, I've asked you a number of times to remember the dead in these Midday Prayers - your own relatives and friends, the victims of war, calamities, accidents. Today I propose we specially remember ~~another~~ a different kind of death - people who can pray to rather than for, those who've died for their faith in Christ. And as today is the feastday of a group of Chinese martyrs, let us pray now, asking their intercession, and strength from their example.

PRAYERS

Ps 144 - a psalm of praise + thanksgiving

People who give their lives as witness to their faith, those we call martyrs, are often regarded as strange, unreasonable fanatics. Attempts are made to explain away their deaths as due to almost any improbable cause rather than admit they died because of their unshakable belief which they refused to hide or show the slightest semblance of compromising. Many of the martyrs, unfortunately, are no more than names even to the best of us - we don't see them as real people.

Take the group of Chinese martyrs commemorated today. Only two names appear in the Prayer of their Mass - and both of these were Frenchmen. The others are simply called their "companions." John Gabriel Dupresne, whose name heads today's group, spent 40 years of his life in China, ^{when he arrived c 1775.} He was a bishop, vicar apostolic of Szechuan Province. A very hardworking devoted missionary, he brought thousands of people to know & love Christ; and was particularly anxious to build up a Chinese priesthood. He himself ordained very many Chinese priests. It was he who called and organized the 1st synod to be held in China, the decrees and regulations of which became the norm for the Church in China. With the growth of persecution of Christians in the last years of the Kien Lung Emperor & under his successor, Bishop Dupresne had much to suffer. He was more than once

exiled from Szechwan; and finally, after many months of suffering in a Chinese prison was beheaded for his constancy in faith. Four of his priests followed his footsteps. Augustine Tselao had been a soldier in the imperial guard which escorted Dupreux to his first exile in Peking. Impressed & influenced by his captive's gentleness and calm, he became a Catechist and later a priest, and was remarkably successful as a preacher. He was captured on his way home from attending a dying man, beaten up & put in prison, where he died. Paul Lieou, another of Dupreux's priests, who started life as a poor peasant, was arrested as he finished Mass ~~one~~ day & died as a result of beating. Joseph Yuen & Thaddaeus Lieou, two more priests, were strangled after being tried - the former, during his trial, countering his judge's insults by preaching about the Kingdom of God. //

Commemorated with these are three Chinese catechists from Kweichow province: Peter Au, who remarked during his trial "If a white cloth is dipped in black dye, how can it be re-whitened? If I stain my soul with even the slightest sign of apostasy, how can I be made clean again? But I refuse to be so stained." He was executed. Peter Lieou was exiled into hard slavery, but later released because of his loyalty during the war with the Moslems in N.W. China which followed

soon after the Tai Ping Rebellion in the middle of the last century. Almost 80 yrs. old he went into court again to encourage a defense his two sons, on trial because of their religion. When they were condemned to death he offered to lead them because, as he said, "I know the way there." Instead, he himself was condemned to death for relapsing into his former errors. Joachim Ho, the third catechist, spent 18 yrs. exile in Mongolia, having been branded on the face for his profession of faith. Shortly after returning home, he was again imprisoned, beaten up and finally executed.

Lastly, another group of three - Augustus Chapdelaine who had been only 4 yrs. in China when arrested and tortured to recant. He refused to buy his freedom for money, was condemned to death, hanged upside down in a cellar & then beheaded. Laurence Pe, one of his converts also refused to buy his freedom and was beheaded. Agnes Tseo, a widow and catechist, surrendered herself and asked for the same punishment as her father in Christ, was hanged like him but still alive 3 days, later was taken outside the city & left there to die.

These are just brief facts - but the people were real, men and women who put their whole trust in God, and died for their love of Christ and their brothers in Christ in China