



The Month of May in Dong Lu, Hubei, China

Autumn 1994



This is a paraphrase of an assortment of essays received from the underground Roman Catholic faithful on the celebration of the Month of Mary in 1994 in Dong Lu, Hubei



There are two famous Marian shrines in China. One is the national shrine dedicated to our Lady of Sheshan in Shanghai. The other is dedicated to our Lady of Dong Lu in Hubei. The Shrine at Sheshan is under the control of the Patriotic Association while Dong Lu remains with the loyal underground Roman Catholic Church.

The devotion to the Holy Mother in the village of Dong Lu began in the early 1900's. Every year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims came to pray before Our Lady of Dong Lu.

During the month of May this year, not only all roads leading to Dong Lu were cut off by the Government, but also tickets for all modes of transportation to Dong Lu and its neighboring towns were selectively sold only to those whom the authority identified as non-Catholics. Yet people came from all over the country. They walked or biked days and nights covering hundreds of miles. Cars and trucks drove on little known paths to avoid the Government troops. They all came to the "Hill of the Blessed Mother" to pray. On the sides of the statue, there is a couplet this year. On one side, it said: *"The serpent's head is crushed. Under whose feet was it defeated?"* On the other side: *"My child, what are you afraid of? Mother is at your side."*

On another wall, there was a huge notice announcing the accident injury of the Pope and requesting prayers and sacrifice for his recovery.

Twenty-four hours a day for thirty-one days in May, tens of thousands of people knelt before the statue with both hands folded in front of their chests. After such a long suppression under the Communist government, they could no longer control their emotions and their love for Mary. Many cried openly without any restraint, because they had finally come home and knelt at the feet of their Mother Mary. They simply poured their hearts out to Mary who in turn looked at them with the most understanding smile and motherly love. There was so much to tell their Mother. After 40 years of persecution, how desperately they were in need of Mary. *"Mother of the Church and queen of China, have pity on your children! You have always been keeping the suffering Church in China in your heart, showing solicitude for our sufferings, our weaknesses, and understanding for our needs. Do not leave us. Only under your protection and direction, we have not fallen into the trap of the devil. Grant us the courage to continue our fight. Dear Mother, we beg you to look after the Church in China and to save us."*

Many faithful carefully touched Mary with their rosaries and holy pictures for a brief moment, and these rosaries and holy pictures became a priceless possession to them. There were young, old, disabled, sick, and strong. One could see a sea of humanity stretching over the field, all kneeling and praying with their hands folded. Not one person could be found distracted or talking casually. One lady and her child knelt in front of Mary. While embracing her child, tears covered the woman's face. Next to her was a middle aged man. He too was weeping and praying. Both of them were engaged in a deep conversation with Mary. There were literally tens of thousands like them - weeping, praying and talking to Mary. No doubt, they were all getting the consolation from Mary after such harsh persecution with no end in sight. No doubt, they were offering all their sufferings to Mary not only for the future of the Roman Catholic Church in China, but also for their Holy Father and the Universal Church. No doubt, they were all happy to have arrived in this Hill of the Blessed Mary against great personal risks and financial sacrifice.

May the 24th is the most important feast day of Mary in China. The sky was overcast. It began to drizzle. The underground Church has no church in Dong Lu. The Mass was celebrated in the open field. About eight o'clock in the morning, the procession for the Holy Mass was about to start. Four bishops and about 120 priests arriving from underground dioceses all over China concelebrated the Mass with the main celebrant His Excellency Bishop Su Chi-Min, the auxiliary bishop of Baoding. The procession also included over 100 seminarians, 200 nuns, many deacons and minor seminarians. Just at this time, the drizzle became steady pouring rain and the rain became heavier. The procession continued. Nothing could stop their devotion to their Most Holy Mother.

Imagine the scene. There were over fifty thousand pilgrims. Few had umbrellas. Most have only a piece of vinyl sheet. When they saw the priests, seminarians, and nuns

proceeding in the rain without any covers, they pushed forward trying to offer whatever protection their umbrellas and vinyl could bring. In an instant, all were wet and soaked. But their spirit was at the highest, marching and singing in the rain. They were soaked in the love of Mary and in the grace of God. It cleansed their hearts and souls. With renewed vigor and determination, together with the entire loyal underground Church, they marched fearlessly against the storm of persecution. No storm could stop their march. No persecution could crush them. With their heads held high, the suffering Church marched on, proud to show their faith and to share the cross of our Redeemer. The crucified Christ will be the risen Christ. The storm will make way for the sunny days.

The Mass started. Every one knelt down in the mud. From more than fifty thousand faithful, the sound of hymns and prayers waffled through the fields rising directly to heaven. The experience was very inspirational. The history of the Church came into my mind. From the persecution of the Church in the Qing dynasty to the current communist regime, the schismatic Patriotic Association, the imprisonment and torture of bishops, priests, nuns, and faithful, the thousands of martyrs, the destruction and confiscation of the Church properties , the ban on religious activities - all testifying vividly that the Roman Catholic Church is moaning under the persecution of the communist government, praying for the mighty God's mercy to save them. Regardless of all the hardships, the Mass of May 24, 1994 in Dong Lu must be, we dare to say, the dawn of the recovery of the Roman Catholic Church in China.

"My eyes are getting blurry. Tears and rain drops are mixed together, cascading down my body, penetrating my heart."

Mass is still in process...and will never end. The history of the struggle of the Church in China is like a Mass itself which, having been offered to the Lady of China, is accepted by our merciful Lord. After the storm of the persecution, with the seeds of martyrdom, the Church in China will grow with new vitality."

Our Lady of China, Our Lady of She Shan, Our Lady of Dong Lu, pray for us.