



## Homily to Chinese Catholics

At a Mass Celebrated for the Catholics of China

In The Church of the Queen of the Angels and Queen of Martyrs

Rome, June 30, 1991



*This was the Cardinal's first Mass and homily after he was elevated to Cardinal.*



Dear Fathers, Sisters and Catholics of Shanghai, Soochow and Nanking dioceses, all my dear Chinese Catholics and all my beloved Catholics present here,

Today, I am very happy that I am in Rome, the Holy City, and that I can celebrate Mass in this Church of the Queen of the Angels and Queen of Martyrs.

Today is Sunday and the Mass is that of the thirteenth Sunday of the year. But today is also June 30th, the feast of the First Martyrs of the See of Rome. Today, the Church wants us to commemorate all the martyrs of the first three centuries of the Church's history. Jesus Christ redeemed us by His Passion and Death. The Church He founded was destined to be a suffering Church. Jesus repeatedly and solemnly said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to follow me must take up his cross daily and follow me." Again he said, "No disciple is greater than his master. As they treated me, so they will treat you."

Jesus Christ built His Church on St. Peter, the Rock. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it. This rock is nothing else but our strong faith in Jesus Christ, our great love for Jesus Christ, a love which will lead us not to hesitate to shed our blood and accept execution. Yesterday, we celebrated the great feast of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul. Today, we celebrate the first martyrs of the first three centuries of the Church. However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that the persecution of the Church is an event of past history. No! Never! The Church,

from the time of its foundation by Jesus Christ, throughout these two thousand years up to the present time, has always grown and developed amidst persecution. Persecutions began and ended but they never ceased to be a mark of the Church's life.

So we must not be surprised when persecution comes because it is a normal event for the Church to suffer persecution. Once, when Pope Pius XII received a group of seminarians in audience, he asked them how many special signs distinguished the true Church of God. They answered immediately without further thinking, "It is one, holy, catholic and apostolic." The Pope said, "There is still a fifth sign." The seminarians did not know how to answer. The Pope said, "Persecution." So, if the Church enjoyed peace all the time without any persecution, it would be very abnormal. It would be a reason for us to worry and examine ourselves lest anything was going wrong. Perhaps we were not living as faithful disciples of Christ? As persecution must be expected, it comes as a special sign of the Church and we should not try to make compromises or concessions of any kind in order to bring the persecution to an end quickly. We ourselves cannot take the initiative to create or arouse persecution. But if it comes to us one day, not only should we accept it readily from the hand of God but we should even rejoice and be glad. As the Acts of the Apostles records, "... after they were beaten, the apostles left the Council, full of joy that God had considered them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus." (Acts 1:41)

During the past 40 years, the Church in China has suffered severe persecution. We have been able to stand in the front line of the Church. This is our glory. We should be glad and rejoice. As the Shanghai Catholic youths once said, "We are greatly honored to have been born and lived at this important time, able to bear witness to Christ." Christ sees that we are worthy of this honor and wants us to participate more closely in His work of redemption. As St. Paul said and as our Holy Father repeated today during the Angelus message, "We should fill up in ourselves what is lacking in the Passion of Christ." What a great glory it is for us that we can cooperate with Christ in carrying out His work of redeeming the world.

Also, we should not be frightened when persecution comes, because it is not by our own strength that we conquer the world but by the strength of the glorified Christ who has risen from the dead. He said, "Do not fear, for I have conquered the world." In Russia, during the time of Stalin, one of the Communists attacked the Church mercilessly in a speech he made to the Catholics. When he finished, an old man stood up and said, "The Lord is truly risen! Alleluia." After saying this, he sat down peacefully. This was the shortest but most powerful reply that could have been made. Jesus has died and risen, He has redeemed the world. We live and die with Him. Our suffering and death will bring forth the fruit of redemption. Jesus said, "If the grain of wheat does not fall into the ground and die, it remains a single grain. But if it dies, it bears abundant fruit." (Jn. 12:24) During the severe persecutions in the primitive Church, it was said that "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

You have come with me to Rome to accompany me to receive the honor of being a Cardinal. The day before yesterday, during the ceremony when the Holy Father gave the red hat to the new Cardinals, he said, "I am deeply moved as I give my greetings to the Churches that have paid the great price of suffering for their faith, to the priests, religious and Catholics. Today, several of the new Cardinals come from those places." From these words, we know that the Holy Father wants to honor through me, the Church in China, to raise its indomitable spirit shown through so much suffering. Yesterday, in the Hall of Pope Paul v, and today in St. Peter's Square, all the Catholics who had come from many different ranks of the world, praised, supported and

encouraged in their faith our suffering Church in China. We should make continued efforts, deepen our love of our holy faith and strive continually to be faithful to the Church.

During the ceremony when the Holy Father gave the red hat, he used the ancient words, "Receive the red hat...you must be faithful, steadfast, indomitable, even to the shedding of blood." The Holy Father repeatedly emphasized, "even to the shedding of blood." From the day when I was officially proclaimed Cardinal, I will make every effort to be faithful to the teachings of the Church, disregarding any sacrifices. Before, I was in prison for 30 years for my faith and it can be said that I only suffered half martyrdom. I have not yet come to the point of shedding my blood. Now that I wear the red hat and have heard what the Holy Father expects from all the Cardinals, although I am old, I must be more vigorous, make more effort, that I may be faithful to Christ, to His Church, to His Vicar on earth unto death, even to the shedding of blood and execution.

Please pray for me. Pray for the suffering Church in China!