



NEWS REPORT

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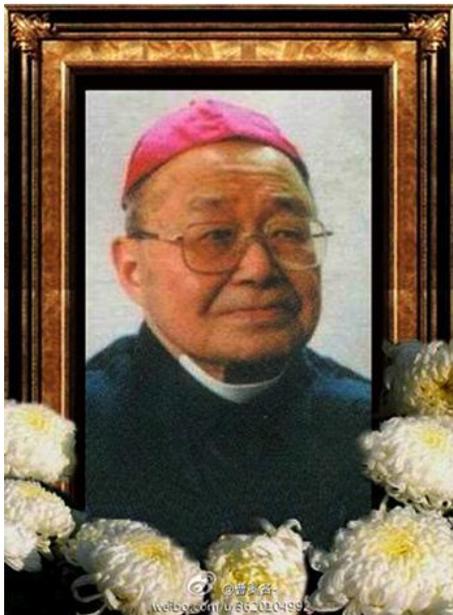


Mgr Fan Zhongliang's body taken to a funeral home, not at church

The local government wants a low profile funeral because it did not recognise him. Requiem Masses said in private and quickly. Young Catholics from both official and underground Churches call on the Church around the world to pray for Christians in China. Under house arrest, Mgr Ma Daqin, bishop of Shanghai, remains silent. Cardinal Zen remembers Mgr Fan as a loyal and kind-hearted bishop.

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by Jian Mei



Shanghai (AsiaNews) - The death of Mgr Joseph Fan Zhongliang, ordinary bishop of Shanghai but not recognised by the government, is creating problems for Chinese authorities.

In Shanghai, a source told AsiaNews that the date and place of the prelate's funeral have not yet been decided, but since Mgr Fan was not recognised as a bishop and because of restrictions on the local Christian community, the funeral will have to be very simple and low profile.

The faithful wanted his body to lay in state at a local church to allow people to pay their respect and pray for him. Instead, his body was taken to a funeral parlour. Still, local authorities did allow Catholics to see the body, but only today and tomorrow, from 9 am to 5 pm.

Despite everything, a few priests were able to pay their respect and celebrated a requiem Mass for him privately and quickly.

An underground priest from eastern China described Bishop Fan as "a brave soldier of Jesus Christ and a model of the Church in China, especially for the clergy who should learn from him."

A source from the official Church said that the situation should remain complex in Shanghai; however, in a long run, young Catholics from both sides ought to cooperate and reconcile.

In fact, "it is high time that all the faithful be united in the Trinity," a young underground Catholic told AsiaNews, and ask for "the return of Mgr Thaddeus Ma Daqin," auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, who is currently under house arrest. Indeed, "We call on the whole Church around the world to pray for the Church in China that it might bring peace and joy to the world".

According to a statement by the Cardinal Kung Foundation, Bishop Fan had high fever for several days before he died.

Upon his death, an underground priest immediately performed a Mass in Bishop Fan's own flat for the repose of his soul.

Shortly after the Mass, several Shanghai government officials arrived and ordered Bishop Fan's body immediate move to a funeral home, the statement noted.

Since many Catholics are expected to attend his funeral, the underground Church asked the government to allow a funeral Mass at St Ignatius Cathedral, but the request was denied. Born in 1918, Bishop Fan was baptised in 1932 and joined the Society of Jesus in 1938 at the age of 20. He was ordained a priest in 1951.

In 1955, along with Bishop Ignatius Kung Pin-mei of Shanghai and many priests and laypeople, then Father Fan Zhongliang was arrested and charged with counter-revolutionary crimes.

In 1958, he was sentenced to 20 years of hard labour in Qinghai province. He was released in 1978.

In 1985, Father Fan was secretly ordained coadjutor bishop of Shanghai. In 1989, he was named as the head of the underground Bishops' Conference, but the latter did not have Holy See recognition.

In 2000, Card Ignatius Kung, who lived in the United States, passed away. Bishop Fan succeeded him as the ordinary bishop of Shanghai. However, Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian had already been named Shanghai's coadjutor bishop in the official Church. Mgr Jin died in April 2013.

Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai has been under restrictions since his Episcopal ordination in July 2012 with papal approval. Bishop Ma gave up his position in the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. Later, Chinese authorities revoked his Episcopal authority in December 2012.

This morning, Bishop Ma posted his thoughts on his blog. Quoting Matthew 19:20-21, which relates the story of Jesus meeting a young man, he called on the Lord to "help us today live out a Christian life, follow your commandments, love you and love the public."

Speaking about Bishop Fan's death, Shanghai-born Card Joseph Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, described him as a loyal servant of the Lord and a kind-hearted shepherd. In fact, his name Fan Zhongliang actually means loyal and kind-hearted.

Bishop Fan "completed his Way of the Cross," Card Zen said. "He has peacefully returned to the Father's home. We will miss him and remember his example. May he continue to care for his flock from Heaven."

Addressing Shanghai Catholics directly, Card Zen also noted, "Don't be afraid while facing raging waves. With faith in Him, you will reach the shore safely."