



NEWS REPORT

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Authorities in Shanghai allow Masses for the late underground bishop

Masses are being held at the funeral home where the body is on display. Mass was also celebrated at St Ignatius Cathedral, where the faithful placed a catafalque to honour the late underground bishop. Official and underground Catholics have come together to pay their respect to Mgr Fan.

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by John Ai



Shanghai (AsiaNews) - The authorities in Shanghai have granted Catholics in the diocese the right to celebrate Masses for their bishop, Mgr Joseph Fan Zhongliang, who died on 16 March.

Mgr Fan, ordinary bishop of Shanghai, belonged to the underground Church, which the government does not recognise.

When his death was announced, the authorities banned the body from being taken to a church, and took him instead to a funeral home where they allowed the faithful to pay their respect from 9 am to 5 pm yesterday and today.

They did eventually allow Masses on the same premises, which is in fact what several priests have been doing since yesterday.

Although the government ordered a low-profile funeral, crowds of the faithful from both the official and underground communities have been coming to the services.

A priest also publicly prayed for Mgr Thaddeus Ma Daqin, bishop of Shanghai, this according to a Catholic who attended Mass.

Since the day of his ordination, Bishop Ma has been under house arrest after quitting the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association.

Parishioners were also able to get a catafalque placed in St Ignatius Cathedral, the See of the Bishop of Shanghai, where a Mass was celebrated for Mgr Fan as well.

Bishop Fan died two days ago, Msgr. Jin died last year. But the Lord has not left the Church in Shanghai without a guide. On the surface there may seem to be a vacuum, but in reality, the presence of Msgr. Thaddeus Ma Daqin ensures continuity.

Shanghai Catholics feel the same respect and appreciation of Msgr. Ma. Maybe some criticize, but the majority follows him and loves him as the pastor of Shanghai. And it is a wonderful thing that he is the successor to both Msgr. Jin and Msgr. Fans. Through him the Church of Shanghai can really live a new era of reconciliation.

I believe that the government would do well to allow to Msgr. Ma celebrate the funeral of Msgr. Fan Zhongliang. It would be a respectful gesture towards religious freedom and towards an elderly person, such as Msgr. Fans. In addition, Msgr. Ma Daqin's presence would guarantee not only a fitting funeral, but also an experience of fraternity and harmony among Christians, from which the entire city could only benefit.



