

**Life**

There are a total of 121 canonized Chinese martyrs, of which 120 were canonized in 2000, and St. Perboyre, the first canonized Chinese martyr, was canonized in 1996. He was born in France in 1802 to a family of many vocations; including him, six brothers and sisters out of eight lived consecrated lives. In his childhood, Perboyre was clever and sincere, his classmates called him the "Little Saint". At 15, he accompanied his younger brother Louis to enter a minor seminary to help him familiarize with the environment. There he felt a calling himself and decided to stay. He and his younger brother later both entered the Congregation of the Mission and were ordained as priests. Fr. Perboyre always wanted to do overseas missionary work, but was rejected due to poor health. In 1831, his brother Louis died of illness on the way to preach in China and said he hoped his brother would finish his mission. In 1835, Fr. Perboyre was finally approved to preach in China according to his brother's wish. His voyage took more than five months, and he encountered hurricane and shipwreck before he arrived in Macau. He started to learn the Chinese language. In 1836 he was assigned to go north. At that time the Qing Government shut themselves out from the world and were suspicious of foreigners. Fr. Perboyre disguised himself as a Chinese, took a long trip of eight months in a Chinese junk, on foot, and on horseback before reaching Nanyang in Henan to preach. Besides the dangerous journey, the priest also got so ill that he received the last sacrament, but he resolutely survived all hardships and diligently studied on the way, so that on his arrival, he could already use Chinese to preach and listen to confessions.

In 1838, he was ordered to go to Hubei. At that time, Sino-foreign relations were even tenser. The following year, the officials, using Emperor Quinlong's decree, forbade preaching. All foreigners who violated the decree would be executed. A catechumen, tempted by 30 oz. of silver as reward money, took troops to arrest Fr. Perboyre. The priest prevented a friend who tried to protect him by using force and was arrested with several believers. In the following twelve months, the priest continued to be tried, whipped, and was treated with inhumane tortures to force him to renounce his faith and reveal his companions, until his body was totally battered such that even some non-believers found it unbearable. After one of the severe tortures, a guard took the initiative to wash his body and was touched that even when dying, he remained friendly and steadfast. Persecution of Christians spread and many believers who were arrested renounced their faith. Some of these spit on Fr. Perboyre during trials on the order of officials. The priest felt heartbroken that people abandoned their faith, but he said he would rather die than deny his faith. He was sentenced to be strangled. On September 11, 1840 (Friday), the executioners removed Fr. Perboyre's purple chasuble and tied him to a cross-shaped post to execute him. The priest gave out his last breath at 3 p.m.

**Reflection**

In 1889, the Brief of Beatification of John Gabriel Perboyre said, "Divine Goodness reserved for John Gabriel a truly celestial consolation and an honor without equal: the fact that the Passion which he underwent had a particular resemblance to that of our Redeemer." Scholars have compared the priest's martyrdom with the suffering of Jesus, and cited many similarities, especially the betrayal, tried in front of different people, whipped, abandoned by his disciples/catechesis, the way of execution and the date and time of death. Fr. Perboyre is a real Christian. He follows the footsteps of Christ with his life and did not abandon Christ during his sufferings. The Lord rewarded him with the crown of a saint.

**Prayer**

We can savour the prayer written by St. Perboyre, and learn his wholehearted devotion to the Lord: "O my Divine Saviour, transform me into yourself. May my hands be the hands of Jesus. May my tongue be the tongue of Jesus, grant that every faculty of my body may serve only to glorify you. Above all, transform my soul and all its powers, so that my memory, my will and my affections may be the memory, the will and the affections of Jesus. I pray you to destroy in me all that is not you. Grant that I may live but in you and for you, and that I may truly say with St. Paul: 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.' (Gal 2:20)."

May we learn from St. Perboyre to follow Christ fearlessly,  
and ask the Lord to transform us so that we live for the Lord.  
St. Perboyre, pray for us.