

Life

On October 1st of the Millennium, Pope John Paul II officially canonized 120 Chinese martyrs, the first on the list was St. Rong Zhao. St. Rong Zhao was born in Guizhou Province in 1746. His original name was Rong Zhu. When he was young, his life was one of debauchery, and he worked as a soldier. In the 37th year of Qianlong's reign, the church suffered persecution, and believers were arrested and imprisoned. Two years later, Father Jean Martin Moye, a foreign missionary, was arrested, and Rong Zhu was his jail-keeper. While in jail, the priest continued to spread his faith and influenced the prisoners. Rong Zhu was very moved by Fr. Moye's preaching. When the priest was released from prison, Rong Zhu accompanied him on his journey for several miles. They talked about the Catechism, and he firmly believed in the Lord since then. Two years later, Father Moye baptized him with the Christian name of Augustine. The priests saw that Rong Zhu had strong faith and talent and began to teach him Latin, asking him to assist in spreading the faith and shepherd believers. Zhu Rong worked tirelessly, was fervent and reliable.

Because the imperial court was suspicious of foreigners, the foreign missionary's apostolic representative tried to set up a local church so that when Western missionaries were to be expelled from China, evangelization work could still carry on. Elites were selected to be trained to become priests; Rong Zhu was one of the few selected. He was trained in the newly formed seminary for one year and was ordained a priest with another seminarian. They were the first Chinese parish priests; he was 35 years old and changed his surname to Zhao, and became Fr. Zhao, Rong. He fulfilled his pastoral duties well and preached in the wilderness of Yunnan. He travelled a lot and worked hard, with very good results. In Western Sichuan Province, he was in charge of church affairs and visited the faithful everywhere, explained the faith, and administered sacraments tirelessly. In the 19th year of Jiaqing's reign, persecutions arose again, Fr. Zhao was arrested after visiting a believer who was seriously ill. He suffered severely in prison. The state officials forced him to renounce his faith, Fr. Zhao said: "I am willing to accept all kinds of punishments, but the one thing I cannot do is abandon my Lord Jesus Christ." The state officials humiliated and tortured him. Father Zhao couldn't withstand the tortures due to his advanced age. He died in prison in 1815 at the age of 69. He was the first martyred diocese priest born and raised in China to be canonized.

Reflection

Saint Rong Zhao was smart and capable, but when he was young, he lived immodestly and had no direction in life, but he accepted the call of God in prison and was transformed, he followed the will of God until his death. Because he had encountered temptations and been in sinful environments, after becoming a priest, he was able to understand and strengthen the flock entrusted to his care. It is said that when he visited the faithful at one place, he would give sermon for three days, especially explaining the Ten Commandments, seven capital sins, indulgence, etc., and when he spoke about the passion of Christ, he greatly touched his listeners. After the three days of sermon, he listened to confessions, earnestly persuaded and helped the faithful to repent. St. Rong Zhao was full of faith, fully dedicated his time and abilities and preached affectionately. We have also been given the grace to join the church. Can we also share our faith with others with a grateful heart?

Prayer

St. Rong Zhao emphasized on the sacrament of reconciliation. He hoped that the faithful could experience the Lord's love, repent truthfully, be sorry for their sins, and never commit sins again. He would want us to savour each word of the Act of Contrition when we have sinned and ask for God's forgiveness with a sorrowful heart: "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen."

May we learn from St. Rong Zhao to follow the Lord closely until death,
And when we have sinned, repent and beg the Lord for forgiveness.
St. Rong Zhao, pray for us.