

Life

St. Da Peng Zhang was born in Guizhou in 1754 and was a well-off businessman. Since his youth, he always wanted to search for the truth. Initially he followed the Qingshui Sect, and later converted to Taoism. At the age of 40, he moved to Guiyang to start a partnership business in the silk industry. The partner's son preached to him and provided him with many catechism books, which provided him with answers that he had been searching for since a long time. However, his family opposed his conversion. In addition, he had been married for many years without any children and had taken a concubine who bore him a son. This violated the Catholic's monogamy rules. After a long period of consideration, he provided dowry money to marry off his concubine, which eliminated the biggest obstacle to his conversion.

At that time, the imperial court banned Christianity. Even before Da Peng Zhang was baptized, he bought a house jointly with his friends and provided it for the missionaries to preach there secretly. Da Peng Zhang was baptized in the 5th year of Jiaqing. His two younger brothers held positions in the government offices, and several of his relatives were officials. They all felt that he should not violate the government's ban to embrace a Western religion and persuaded him to give up, but he refused. His two younger brothers then falsely accused him of being a member of the White Lotus Society which organized a revolution. Da Peng Zhang escaped when he heard about it, and after the situation calmed down, he returned and continued to evangelize. His wife and son were also baptized. In the 7th year of Jiaqing, Da Peng Zhang received first Communion, and he became more passionate and became the leader of Guiyang's religious academic affairs. He often visited the poor and elderly and arranged for their funerals. In the 13th year of Jiaqing, the priest hired him as the principal and catechism teacher. Da Peng Zhang was diligent and conscientious. Three years later, the White Lotus Society caused chaos once more and implicated the Christians. Da Peng Zhang again fled for refuge. Many believers including Da Peng Zhang's eighteen year old son De Wang Zhang were arrested. The government coerced De Wang to confess his father's whereabouts, but he refused and willingly received the punishment on behalf of his father. He was exiled to Longquan County and died there within two years.

After the death of his beloved son, Da Peng Zhang had no resentment and became more eager to preach everywhere. The government vigorously hunted for him, so he fled to Chongqing. However, Bishop Gabriel Taurin Dufresse, (who was later martyred and canonized), believed that leaders should not flee when the faithful in the church were in trouble and ordered him to return. Da Peng Zhang obeyed his order, made his confession, received Holy Communion and returned to Guiyang to preach in secret, with his mind set on martyrdom. In the 19th year of Jiaqing, his wife's brother betrayed him for the reward. Da Peng Zhang was arrested, imprisoned, and whipped together with other believers who refused to worship idols. Da Peng Zhang was tried many times. Because he came from a wealthy family and was highly respected, he was constantly being persuaded to apostatize, but he refused. The governor hosted a banquet for Da Peng Zhang and promised that if he quietly agreed to apostatize, he would not face public humiliation and would be set free. Not only did Da Peng Zhang refused politely, but he also took the opportunity to preach to the governor. In the end, Da Peng Zhang was sentenced to death by strangulation. He had a huge reputation, and it was said that more than a thousand people were converted to Christianity through his teachings. Da Peng Zhang was a stout man; he walked calmly to the execution ground, where a huge crowd watched him. Before the execution, his two brothers and nephew made a final attempt by kneeling down to beg him to apostatize for the sake of their family and reputation, and it would save his life. Da Peng Zhang was unmoved and was immediately hanged on a T-shaped cross and strangled. After his death, his nephew wanted to burn paper money to him, but his father objected and said, "Your uncle never believed in these unrealistic cultural customs, so don't offend him." He died at the age of 61.

Reflection

There is much to learn from St. Da Peng Zhang. He married a concubine in order to have a son, which shows that he valued having descendants. However, because he believed in the Lord his only son died tragically. Deprived of any future generation, he must have been devastated, but he did not blame anyone. Even though he had escaped to a safe place, when the bishop ordered him to return to Guiyang immediately which was surely to face death, any ordinary person would be upset, but Da Peng Zhang did not argue based on his achievements in evangelization, but learned from our Saviour's humility and obedience until death. When he was arrested and tortured, he was unyielding even though his family members cried and pleaded with him. The governor treated him like a distinguished guest, allowing him to secretly apostatize without fear of public humiliation. However, no matter what tempted Da Peng Zhang, he stuck to his faith without wavering. The circumstances of his heroic martyrdom are touching. Even his younger brother, who had always opposed his belief in the Lord, learned to respect his faith, which shows Da Peng Zhang's sacrifice with his life to bear witness is effective. We should learn from him, put aside our own ideas and carry out the Lord's will.

Prayer

St. Da Peng Zhang was sentenced to death for his faith in the Lord but he had no regrets. The only regret was that there were no priests in Guizhou, so he could not go to confession nor receive Holy Communion. We are fortunate to live in a place with religious freedom, so we should cherish every opportunity to step inside a church and pray fervently.

May we learn from St. Da Peng Zhang to be humble and obedient
and carry out the will of God.

St. Da Peng Zhang, pray for us.