

July 21

Saint of the Week: Saint Tian Xiang Ji

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Life

St. Tian Xiang Ji was born in 1834 in Yezhuangtou Village in Hebei. His family was the biggest clan in the village, and they were farmers. The whole family were devoted, with generations of Christians. Tian Xiang Ji was the local church president, and he cared for the church and assisted in rituals. Tian Xiang Ji knew acupuncture and served the poor for free; many people benefitted and spoke highly of him. At the age of 40, he was infected with a serious disease that no medicine could cure. The doctor advised him to treat it with opium, he did and he gradually recovered, but he became addicted. Tian Xiang Ji fought his opium addiction several times but did not succeed. The priest saw that every time after confession, he committed again, so he thought Tian Xiang Ji had no determination of change, and after a few years, he refused to absolve his sins. In the next 30 years, Tian Xiang Ji continued to participate in mass but could not receive the Eucharist. He sadly shed tears many times, saying that he only hoped to be a martyr, otherwise he would not be able to enter heaven. During the Gengzi Boxer rebellion, Tian Xiang Ji's family, with two relatives who came to them fled together, but they were rounded up by the Boxers. The twelve people were sent to the county. Before their journey, his elder daughter-in-law already lost her life while protecting her daughter. She was beheaded, and her head was hung in front of the car. After arriving at the city, because many local people had received favours from Tian Xiang Ji, more than 200 villagers and famous figures in the city showed up to ask for leniency for him. The officials said that the only way to release the Ji family was for them to renounce their faith. Relatives and friends then persuaded Tian Xiang Ji to temporarily abandon their faith or pretend to abandon their faith, but he refused. Officials also continued to persuade them. The two daughters-in-law slightly wavered at the persuasion, but Tian Xiang Ji indicated that their ancestors had been Christians for over 200 years and would definitely not abandon their faith. The officials then handed them to the Boxers. While being transported to the execution ground in the wagon, Tian Xiang Ji led the family to sing the Litany to the Blessed Virgin Mary. On arrival Tian Xiang Ji exercised his parental right to request himself as the last one to be killed. During execution, everyone including the previously hesitant daughters-in-law, calmly faced martyrdom one after the other. After Tian Xiang Ji watched his son, daughters-in-law, and six grandchildren between the ages of 3 to 11 died tragically, he finally smiled and fulfilled his wish to atone his sins by martyrdom, at the age of 66. A statue of him is placed at the St. Anne Shrine in Massachusetts. Many people or family members who have been affected by drug addiction regard him as their patron saint.



Reflection

Because St. Tian Xiang Ji was addicted to drugs due to his sickness, he could not receive Holy Communion even until death. For someone who loved the Lord so much, can you imagine how sorrowful he was? As the priest did not absolve his sins, so even as a highly respected leader, he could only stay in the pew every time Holy Eucharist was distributed in mass. This seemed to remind the congregation that he was a grave sinner, how embarrassing it would be for him? In Tian Xiang Ji's heart, the opportunity for him to go to heaven was minimal, but although he was sad, he was never desperate. He continued to pray and attend mass for more than 30 years. If we were to take his place, would we have his persistence and trust in the Lord, and when others were unsympathetic towards us, would we still perform all the responsibilities of a Christian?

Modern science and psychological studies have pointed out that drug addiction is actually a disease and need to be battle with the support of body, soul and mind. It cannot be healed by one's determination only. The

church would not refuse to perform sacraments for the addicts. In recent years, due to the overdose of opioid drugs, the death rate has increased drastically. The US-Canada government and even World Health Organization have regarded it as a high priority, calling it the opioid pandemic. We should ask St. Tian Xiang Ji to intercede for the brothers and sisters who are drug addicts, and hope that they could get the help and support they need to break free from the snares of drugs.

Prayer

The two daughters-in-law of St. Tian Xiang witnessed the miserable death of their in-laws, and with young children around them, they wavered a little when persuaded to apostatize, but they were woken up by Tian Xiang Ji's righteous reminder. After the whole family chanted the Litany to the Blessed Virgin Mary, they no longer felt scared to give up their lives for their faith. We should also pray eagerly when we are tested, and pray for the help of God to have the courage to testify with our actions.

May we learn from St. Tian Xiang Ji that regardless of what challenges we face,
to do our best to fulfill the Christians' responsibilities.

We pray especially for our brothers and sisters who are drug addicts.

St. Tian Xiang Ji, pray for us.