



ASIA/CHINA - Bishop Yao was truly a good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – On December 30, 2009, Bishop Leo Yao Liang, Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Siwantze (Chongli-Xiwanzi), Hebei Province (Mainland China), died at the age of 86.

The prelate was born on April 11, 1923 in the village of Gonghui, Zhangbei County. Ordained a priest on 1 August 1948, he worked as assistant pastor in several parishes of the diocese until he was prevented from exercising his priestly ministry and was forced to earn a living by growing vegetables and selling firewood. In 1956, he was sentenced to forced labor for refusing to join the movement for the Catholic Church's independence from the Pope. Two years later he was imposed the penalty of life imprisonment for the same "crime", namely the desire to remain faithful to Supreme Pontiff and the Universal Church. He was freed in 1984, after nearly thirty years in prison. He was ordained a bishop on 19 February 2002 and in July 2006 he was again arrested by police following the consecration of a new church in Guyuan County, and spent another thirty months in prison. Once freed, but maintained under close supervision, he was able to commit himself to the affairs of the diocese despite all the difficulties. The Sunday Masses he celebrated every week were attended by more than a thousand worshippers.

Since the death of Bishop Yao, civil authorities have banned the Catholic community from honoring him with the title of "bishop", requiring that they refer to him as a "clandestine shepherd." On the morning of January 6 this month, thousands of faithful from different parts of the country, attended his funeral in spite of police checks and abundant snowfall, thus demonstrating that Bishop Yao was really the good shepherd who gives life for his sheep. In him, as in the other six Chinese bishops who died during the year 2009, the words of the Book of Wisdom have been completed: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace. For if before men, indeed, they be punished, yet is their hope full of immortality; Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself" (Wis 3:1-6). (Agenzia Fides 11/01/2010)