



ASIA/CHINA - The death of Mgr. Chen Shizhong: during forced labor he had received the gift of forgiving his enemies

Yibin (Agenzia Fides) - On December 16, 2012, His Exc. Mgr. John Chen Shizhong, Bishop of the Diocese of Yibin (Suifu), in the province of Sichuan (Mainland China) died. The Archbishop was 95 years old. He was born in 1917 to a Catholic family. When he was ten years old he began his vocational journey in the minor seminary of Yibin, then continued with the philosophical and theological formation at the seminary of the Annunciation. In 1947 he was ordained a priest and worked as a parish priest. In the 50s and during the Cultural Revolution he was first imprisoned and then sentenced to hard labor as a farmer. In this regard, a few months ago, he confided to a faithful that during that ordeal he had received the gift of forgiving his enemies.

In 1985 he was consecrated bishop and in 1988 and was appointed Rector of the Regional Seminary of Sichuan, a position he left the following year for health reasons. He returned to the diocese of Yibin where he remained for over twenty years. On 30 November 2011, seriously ill, he consecrated Rev. Peter Luo Xuegang as Coadjutor for the office in Yibin.

Mgr. John Chen Shizhong, the last elderly Bishop of Sichuan, is remembered for the work of formation of priests and religious women. Thanks to him, in the 80s and 90s, vocations to priesthood and consecrated life resumed throughout the province. Over 30 priests received sacred orders from his hands, thus ensuring the survival and development of the Church in a region, which was characterized by a hard Maoism and in which the hardships and persecutions of the Cultural Revolution strongly influenced the society and the life of the Church.

The funeral of Bishop Chen, celebrated on December 18 in the Cathedral of Yibin, were presided over by His Exc. Mgr. Luo Xuegang. His Excellency Mgr. Paul He Zeqing, Bishop of Wanxian also concelebrated. The Mass was attended by priests, religious women, and many of the faithful of the Diocese. Mgr. Chen's body was then buried in the Catholic cemetery, close to the diocesan seminary. The diocese of Yibin has 9 priests, 7 religious women and 40,000 Catholics. (Agenzia Fides 08/01/2013)