



EUROPE/ITALY – Beatification of Mario Vergara, PIME martyr and Isidoro Ngei Ko Lat, first Burmese Blessed

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – On Saturday, May 24, 2014, in the Cathedral of Aversa, Father Mario Vergara, missionary of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) and his catechist Isidore Ngei Ko Lat will be beatified. They both died as martyrs in Burma in May 1950. Card. Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, will preside at the beatification ceremony.

At the end of the general audience on Wednesday 21 May, Pope Francis recalled the beatification with these words: " On 24 May, PIME missionary Fr Mario Vergara and Isidore Ngei Ko Lat, his faithful catechist, will be beatified at Aversa. The two were killed in 1950 in Burma, out of hatred for the Christian faith. May their heroic fidelity to Christ be an encouragement and example to missionaries and especially catechists in mission lands who carry out important and irreplaceable apostolic work, for which the whole Church is grateful".

Father Mario Vergara was born in Frattamaggiore in 1910. Ordained a priest on August 28, 1934, at the end of September he left for Burma, he was entrusted the district Citaciò in the mountains and forests of Soku, one of the Kayin. With the help of catechists he faced countless hardships. During World War II, in 1941 he was interned, with all the Italian missionaries in British concentration camps in India, where he stayed for 4 years. After a period spent in Italy he returned to Burma, and went on a new mission among the Red Kayin, east of Loikaw, near the Salween River. After independence from England (1948), riots and civil war broke out between government and Kayin rebels. Father Vergara takes up the defense of the oppressed, and was very much hated by the rebels operating in that area. When on May 24, 1950 Father Vergara, together with the catechist Isidore went to demand the release of another catechist who had been arrested, he was faced by the rebel leader Richmond, after a tough interrogation, he orders their arrest. Both were massacred on the banks of the Salween River, probably in the early hours of May 25. Their bodies, sealed in a bag, were thrown into the river.

Not much is known about the life of the catechist Isidore Ngei Ko Lat, who is the first Burmese faithful to be beatified. Baptized on September 7, 1918, Isidoro belonged to a family of farmers, who converted to Catholicism. As a child he attended the missionaries and often went with them. He entered the minor seminary in Toungoo, demonstrating zeal and commitment, but because of poor health he had to return to his family . However, he decided to dedicate his life to the Lord, he did not get married and opened a private free school, where he held catechism classes. In 1948 he met Fr.Vergara, who invited him to carry out the service of catechist in Shadaw. (SL) (Agenzia Fides 23/05/2014)