

Bulletin Article for the Fifteenth Sunday in OT-A
July 12, 2020

Our Gospel this week contains the very familiar Parable of the Sower, and this is linked nicely to the reading from the Old Testament where Isaiah speaks about the efficacy of God's word coming to the earth and only returning to God once it has accomplished what it set out to do. Over the past few weeks the weekday Masses have contained celebrations of the lives of those who have sown the seed of Christ with their own blood. Last Monday it was the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul, followed by the First Roman Martyrs, St Thomas the Apostle, and perhaps a slightly lesser known group of martyrs, St Augustine Zhao Rong, priest, and companions. Since this group is not as well known, I thought that I would share a bit about their story here.

The optional feast day is July 9, and this feast celebrates the lives of 120 martyrs who witnessed to the Faith with their own blood in China. They died over a span of many years of persecution from 1648 until 1930. 87 of the 120 martyrs were born in China and were children, parents, catechists, and simple laborers who ranged in age from 9 years old to 72 years old. Four of these 87 martyrs were Catholic priests.

The "foreign-born" martyrs in the group were largely priests and women religious who were (in large part) members of the Order of Preachers, the Paris Foreign Mission Society, the Order of Friars Minor, the Jesuits, the Salesians, and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

Augustine Zhao Rong was a Chinese soldier who accompanied the prisoner Bishop John Gabriel Taurin Dufresse (of the Paris Foreign Mission Society) to his martyrdom in Beijing. So moved was Augustine Zhao Rong at the courage shown by the Bishop as he faced death willingly for Christ, that he was moved to seek Baptism. Not long after his Baptism, Augustine Zhao Rong was ordained to serve as a diocesan priest. He was martyred in 1815.

Over many years, the entire group of martyrs was honored by the Church by being Beatified in small groups. It was St Pope John Paul II who canonized the entire group of 120 martyrs on October 1, 2000.

We give thanks for these and all our glorious martyrs who have sown the seed of Christ's Word into the world with their very own blood. As we honor these women and men of great faith, let us ask for their prayers that we, too, might faithfully serve the Lord and sow His Seed in our world without counting the cost.

~ Fr. Tom Gaughan, csc