

May 24 - World Day of Prayer for the Church in China

Witnesses of Hope

(Prayer guide)



Introduction

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI published a letter in 2007 addressed to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in China. In it Pope Benedict designated May 24th, the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians as an annual worldwide day of prayer for the Church in Mainland China:

"I encourage you to celebrate [the day of prayer] by renewing your communion of faith in Jesus our Lord and of faithfulness to the Pope, and by praying that the unity among you may become ever deeper and more visible. I remind you, moreover, of the commandment that Jesus gave us, to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us, as well as the invitation of the Apostle Saint Paul: 'First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'" (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Our Lady, Help of Christians, is venerated with great devotion at the Marian shrine at Sheshan in Shanghai. That is the reason why the Holy Father chose May 24 to be observed as a Day of Prayer for the Church in China.

The Word of God (Lk 1:44-55)

From the Gospel of Luke:

Mary said:" My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. He looks on his servant in her lowliness; henceforth all ages will call me blessed. The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy his name! His mercy is from age to age, on those who fear him. He puts forth his arm in strength and scatters the proud-hearted. He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly. He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty. He protects Israel, his servant, remembering his mercy, he mercy promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his sons for ever".

The Word of God **All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

A message from Pope Francis

As the Church marks a Day of Prayer for the Church in China, on May 24, 2020 Pope Francis assured Chinese Catholics of the nearness of the universal Church:

"Dearest Catholic brothers and sisters in China, I wish to assure you that the universal Church, of which you are an integral part, shares your hopes and supports you in your trials. She accompanies you with prayer for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the light and beauty of the Gospel might shine in you as the power of God for the salvation of those who believe."

Pope Francis prayed that the Chinese faithful "might be strong in faith and steadfast in fraternal union, joyful witnesses, promoters of charity and hope, and good citizens."

(Homily/Witness)



Prayer to Our Lady of Sheshan

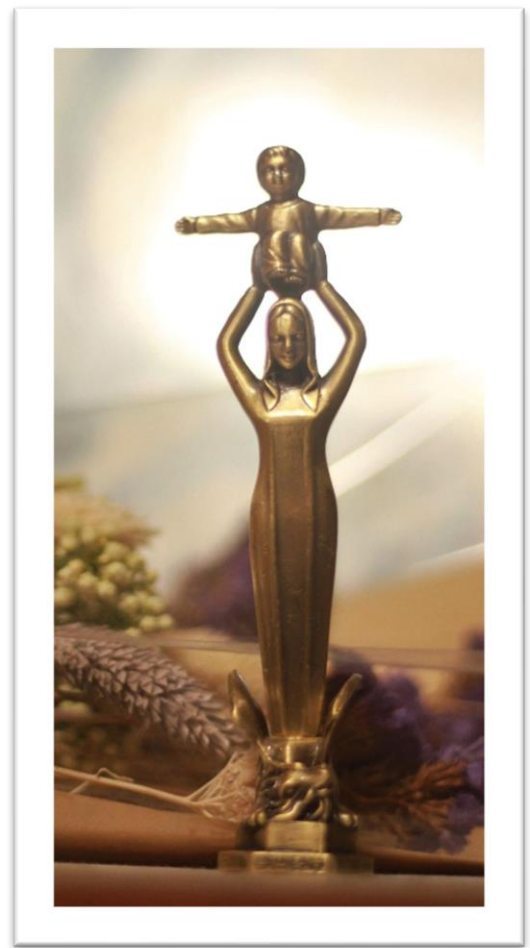
Virgin Most Holy, Mother of the Incarnate Word and our Mother, venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan under the title "Help of Christians", the entire Church in China looks to you with devout affection. We come before you today to implore your protection. Look upon the People of God and, with a mother's care, guide them along the paths of truth and love, so that they may always be a leaven of harmonious coexistence among all citizens.

When you obediently said 'yes' in the house of Nazareth, you allowed God's eternal Son to take flesh in your virginal womb and thus to begin in history the work of our redemption.

You willingly and generously cooperated in that work, allowing the sword of pain to pierce your soul, until the supreme hour of the Cross, when you kept watch on Calvary, standing beside your Son, who died that we might live.

From that moment, you became, in a new way, the Mother of all those who receive your Son Jesus in faith and choose to follow in his footsteps by taking up his Cross.

Mother of hope, in the darkness of Holy Saturday you journeyed with unflinching trust towards the dawn of Easter.



Grant that your children may discern at all times, even those that are darkest, the signs of God's loving presence.

Our Lady of Sheshan, sustain all those in China, who, amid their daily trials, continue to believe, to hope, to love.

May they never be afraid to speak of Jesus to the world, and of the world to Jesus. In the statue overlooking the Shrine you lift your Son on high, offering him to the world with open arms in a gesture of love.

Help Catholics always to be credible witnesses to this love, ever clinging to the rock of Peter on which the Church is built. Mother of China and all Asia, pray for us, now and for ever. Amen

Intercessions



Presider: “I praise you, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to the little ones.” Gracious Father, Your Son, Jesus Christ, with these words cried out with joy when the seventy-two disciples returned excited from their mission to preach the Gospel. We hope He rejoices too in the efforts of so many around the world that today give witness to the Gospel, live their faith, and share the good news of Jesus particularly in China. Hence, we ask:

R/ Merciful Father: Give them strength and courage.

- ❖ **Lector:** For the Church throughout the world; may it be a visible sign of unity; and for the Church in China; may it persevere in witness to the faith. **R/**
- ❖ **Lector:** For bishops, priests, religious, women and men in the ministry of the gospel particularly in China. Maintain and deepen their faith. Give them creativity and courage to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ into Chinese society. **R/**
- ❖ **Lector:** We ask for the unity of the Church of China, Strengthen the spirit of reconciliation, heal all wounds of the past and overcome division and resentment. Strengthen the unity of all believers throughout the worldwide Catholic Church. **R/**
- ❖ **Lector:** For the many people of good will in China and all over the world. The love they show is a gift from your grace. Give them an encounter with the Gospel through the ministry of the Church, so that they can recognize this source of life and commit even more intensively to build a world filled with peace and justice. **R/**
- ❖ **Lector:** God of love, of protection and providence, we pray for our brothers and sisters who live in China. Empower the Christians who are unable to worship You in public places. Strengthen those who speak your name in public and face difficulties for openly witnessing their faith. **R/**
- ❖ **Lector:** Protect your people as they read your word under the flickering lights of night. Remind them that they are seen, known, and delighted in by the one who created them, who created the world. Strengthen them with the knowledge that they are remembered in prayer. **R/**
- ❖ **Lector:** Bestow upon all politicians in the world, especially those in charge in the People’s Republic of China, wisdom and prudence, a listening heart and respect for human rights and the dignity of every human being especially their own people. **R/**

Presider: Merciful Lord, it is a great gift that we are allowed to live and profess our faith freely. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Love of God and neighbour obliges us to make good use of this freedom to boldly proclaim the Gospel to all people in active love. We are ready for this ministry, bless us for it. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **R/ Amen.**

Our Father

Closing prayer

Presider: God our Father, accept the prayers and offerings of your believers, especially those who live in China. Look at the many sacrifices and all the suffering that people endure for your name’s sake. Accept their loyalty and devotion and let them have a life in the glory of heaven.

Together with “Mary, Mother of the Church” and “Help of Christians” we ask you: give peace and freedom to all people in the world so that they may faithfully serve you and work in love for their fellow human beings. Give to the witnesses of faith and to all of us a deep faith, a joyful hope, and a sacrificial love. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. **All. Amen**



Final Blessing

Presider: May the Lord bless and keep you!

May the Lord increase your faith, so that it becomes an even-stronger source of love and joy for you and for all people who are dear and important to you.

May the Lord bless and encourage you!

May the Lord give you an irrepresible urge, through the preaching of his Gospel, to encourage people and give them strength to love, willingness to make sacrifices and above all a joy that is contagious.

May the Lord bless and strengthen you!

May the Lord be with you in dark times and help you to find answers

to your questions and solutions to the complex problems, and to know that one day you will enter into fellowship with him in eternal life.

May the Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you all together with our sisters and brothers in China and all over the world! **All: Amen**



Statistics of the Catholic Church in China 2020

The following figures on the Catholic Church in Mainland China in 2020 are based on data from the Holy Spirit Study Centre (HSSC) of the Diocese of Hong Kong.

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| Faithful | Approximately 10 million Catholics, including both those of the official (registered) Church and those in the unregistered Church (State statistics estimate around 6 million Catholics in the official/registered Church) |
| Dioceses | 146 dioceses (115 dioceses and 31 other ecclesiastical circumscriptions). Only 102 of them are recognized by the Government. |
| Bishops | 99 bishops of whom: 72 bishops in the official (registered) Church (66 in office) 27 bishops in the unregistered Church (14 in office). Since September 2018 all Chinese bishops are recognised by the Pope. |
| Priests | Approximately 4.000 in total (the number of new unofficial priests and of those who refuse to officially register is not available) |
| Seminaries and Seminarians | Of the original 10 major seminaries in the registered Church of Mainland China, only 6 are still operating, even though government agencies continue to report their number as nine. In these 6 major seminaries there are around 350 seminarians belonging to the official (registered) Church. To this number should be added around 70 seminarians of the unregistered Church. |
| Nuns/Religious Sisters | 4,600 Sisters in total, of whom: approximately 3,250 of the registered Church in 87 congregations, plus approximately 1,350 of the unregistered Church in 40 congregations. |
| Churches | More than 6.000 churches and oratories, according to official estimates. |