



The Martyrs of China Who were they?

We present to you the life of seven Franciscan Missionaries of Mary put to death for their faith in Christ, together with several bishops, priests, seminarians and lay persons in China, on July 9, 1900 at Taiyuanfu.



Why are we speaking of them today?

Because they are martyrs, that is witnesses who gave their lives to Jesus and to his Gospel. Today, as yesterday, the sap that nourishes and unites the martyrs of former times with those of the present is the same: the life of Jesus, testimony of his love of the Father, and his message of a universal fraternity built on justice and mercy, striving for peace. These men and women, witnesses of yesterday or today, have the same basic attitudes:

*open to God, attentive to the Spirit,
committed to serving others,
filled with true love.*

To know these seven FMM martyrs can help us better understand God's ways in our own lives and affirm in us a simple but real commitment to the service of the Gospel.

A short historical survey

In 1898, Monsignor Francisco Fagolla, coadjutor of Shanxi, China, came to Rome. He wanted to have a community of missionary religious for his distant mission in this immense country of Asia, where a small group of new Christians was growing. The presence of women was missing in order to reveal the mystery of God's love in and through Jesus. This numerous people had yet to discover it. Even today, they are the most numerous on our planet.



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He met Mary of the Passion, Superior General and foundress of the new specifically *missionary* congregation whose purpose was to bring the Good News of Salvation to the most perilous and distant countries. The missionary bishop made known his needs: to organize a small hospital, to transform the orphanage with already a few hundred children into a more educative place, to empower women through the teaching of home and life skills. They would teach hygiene, cooking, and show them the dignity of work by awakening them to the faith, to prayer, to singing. These were very concrete and urgent needs. First, they would have to learn Chinese to be able to communicate and thus immerse themselves in the life of the people. This would not be easy as the road to Shanxi was long, dangerous expedition.

Mary of the Passion listened. She felt that God wanted her sisters sent there. After long reflection, in a positive response, she accepted the challenge. She searched among her sisters and proposed the new mission to several of them. Little by little, she formed the group with sisters of different nationalities, as is the case whenever possible within the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

After a long journey, not without risks and sufferings, but lived with courage, awe, and Franciscan good humour, the seven FMM arrived in Taiyuanfu, on May 4, 1899. Upon arrival, they devoted themselves to 200 or so little girls in the orphanage, to a group of consecrated laity, and to the service of the dispensary while awaiting the building of a hospital. With tact, patience, and creativity, they entered little by little into this new and complex world. They worked with love and tenacity at improving the quality of life for all. One year after their arrival, on May 4, 1900, the house was flourishing.

However, for a few months, a wave of violence crossed the country. The complex causes were many and sometimes contradictory. This violence appeared in different ways, but especially directed against the Christian communities and the missionaries. The threats were becoming increasingly clear. Acts of violence were growing in the region. On June 27, the situation became extremely tense. The Bishops, fearing for the religious sisters, asked them to put on Chinese clothes and try to save themselves. Marie Hermine responded in the name of all:

«For the love of God, do not prevent us from dying with you. If our courage is weak, believe me that God who sends this test will give us strength to face it bravely. We fear neither death nor torments... We came here to live in charity and to shed our blood for the love of Jesus Christ if need be».

On July 5, bishops, religious, seminarians, lay people, and our seven young sisters were imprisoned. They knew that death was near and while awaiting it, they remained in peace: *had they not lived their whole life with the desire of transforming it into gift?* Finally, on July 9, at about 4 pm, they were dragged through the streets of the town, to the tribunal, where they were massacred by order of the governor. The last to fall were the FMM. They embraced for the last time, chanting a song of praise, the *Te Deum*, and presenting their heads to the soldiers.



*«I can say with Saint Francis,
Now, I have seven true Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.»*

**Mary of the Passion, September 22, 1900
(The day she learnt the news)**

Pope Pius XII beatified them on November 24, 1946 and Pope John Paul II canonized them on October 1, 2000 in Rome.

Who were they?

Seven women like us, coming from different countries sent to China at the service of their brothers and sisters for whom, they gave their lives on July 9, 1900.

Seven religious consumed with the desire to serve God, the Church, and the mission with their gifts, their limitations, their temperament, and their backgrounds.

Seven Franciscan Missionaries of Mary having one common characteristic: the earnest desire to open their lives to the Spirit and to respond to God's call to the end.

Seven young women, seven lives:

Marie-Hermine de Jésus, French, 34 years old, community superior,

Maria della Pace, Italian, 25 years old, the youngest,

Maria Chiara, Italian, 28 years old,

Marie de Sainte Nathalie, French, 36 years old,

Marie de Saint Just, French, 34 years old,

Marie Adolphine, Dutch, 34 years old,

Maria Amandina, Belgian, 28 years old.

