

Mission Intention MARCH

2019 - 2020

Education for
Community Life

Country Focus: China

Pope's March Prayer Intention

We pray that the Church in China may persevere in its faithfulness to the Gospel and grow in unity

In last year's March newsletter, we read about the Catholic Church in China, and the struggles it faces because of the country's laws on religion. We learned the Church in China is divided, and that Catholics have to choose between government churches, with bishops appointed by Beijing, or underground churches loyal to the Vatican.

But we also learned about a sign of hope for the Church in China, a recent agreement between the Vatican and Beijing intended to help unify the Church in China under the Pope. Since this agreement there have been some signs of positive change. For the first time in almost six decades, all Chinese Catholics were able to celebrate Christmas Mass openly. In 2019, the first bishops approved by the Vatican and China were ordained.

Still, struggles for the Church in China continue. Many are disappointed with the agreement, fearing Beijing will use its influence to ensure the ordination of bishops more loyal to the state than the Church. Another challenge is China's policy requiring clergy to register with the state, and accept the principle of independence. Some fear this will weaken the Church's authority on doctrinal matters. We join with Pope Francis in prayer this month to remember the Church in China, that it may continue to grow in unity.



Saint Spotlight: Saint Josaphat



Perhaps it is not surprising that the first Eastern Rite saint to be formally canonized by the Roman Catholic Church was a bishop who dedicated his life to working for unity.

Saint Josaphat was born around 1580, to Orthodox parents. He worked as a merchant before hearing God's call to the priesthood. He was ordained a priest of the Byzantine Church, an Eastern Rite Church, around 1610. Several years later, he was made bishop of Vitebsk and then Archbishop of Polotsk, both located in what is now Belarus. Saint Josaphat became well known as a preacher, and was admired for his dedication to prayer and fasting.

During the time Saint Josaphat lived, the Eastern Rite Church and the Roman Catholic Church were very divided. This bothered Saint Josaphat, who wanted to bring reconciliation to God's Church. He held synods, offered catechetical instruction, and worked to reform the clergy in the hope that it would unify all Catholics under the Pope. However, there were still many members of Eastern Rite Churches who resisted reconciliation with Rome, especially in his old Diocese of Vitebsk. Saint Josaphat went there to try and bring about peace, but instead was killed by an angry mob. Although in life Saint Josaphat was not able to fully reconcile the Eastern and Latin Rite Catholics in his diocese, his death inspired a movement toward a united Catholic Church, and in the years following his death many people in Vitebsk and Polotsk were reconciled with Rome.

Saint Josaphat is considered a martyr for unity. Let us ask him to intercede on behalf of the Church in China.

Promoting Knowledge
of Faith

God's Word for Mission

"It is neither a culture of confrontation nor a culture of conflict which builds harmony within and between peoples, but rather a culture of encounter and a culture of dialogue; this is the only way to peace" Pope Francis, Wednesday audience, Sept. 1, 2013.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free— and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

Christian Unity



In the middle of his Passion, Jesus prays for the unity of all believers (John 17:21). In response to this prayer, the Church continues to encourage cooperation and harmony among all Christians. The Church teaches that “the unity of all divided humanity is the will of God” (Saint John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, 6). Only when Christians are united with one another are they best able to bear witness to their communion with the Holy Trinity. Pope Francis often talks about a “culture of encounter” and the importance of talking with one another. The Holy Father encourages all Catholics to see everyone as a brother or sister to be welcomed. In his book, On Heaven and Earth, he says that dialogue should be “born from an attitude of respect for the other person.” Catholics are called to see the face of Christ in the other,

and to treat everyone with dignity as a child of God, regardless of their opinions or where they are from. When we work to create respect and make room in our hearts to listen to others’ points of view and learn from their experiences, we serve as a sign of what humanity is supposed to be, and participate in Christ’s mission to embrace all people (Ut Unum Sint, 9).

Living a culture of encounter begins in our own parish communities. In this month’s video, we will learn about St. Patrick Parish in Lawrence, Massachusetts, whose members are adapting to the changing demographics in their community. As you watch the video, think about some of the challenges they face as they try to build unity with one another. How are these challenges barriers to being a true witness to the Gospel of Christ?

Scenes from a Parish: A reflection on the state of the Catholic Church in the US»»

1. What were some of the challenges St. Lawrence faced as they tried to build unity? Have you experienced any of these challenges in your own parish?
2. How can living a culture of encounter help build unity amongst people who are different?
3. How can you practice a “culture of encounter” with those who are different from you in your own community?



Mission Petitions

- ✚ Let us pray for the continued unification of the Church in China.
- ✚ Let us pray for all Christian churches and faith communities, that they may be faithful witnesses to the Gospel call to reconciliation.
- ✚ Let us pray that all people will value dialogue more than disagreement, and peace more than protest.
- ✚ Let us pray that all Catholics may learn to honor diversity in their parishes: in culture, ethnicity, language, and life.

Loving God,
Your Son, Jesus Christ, broke bread and shared the cup with his friends on the eve of his Passion. May your Church grow together in closer communion. Like Saint Josaphat, give us strength to build bridges of compassion and unity with one another. We ask this through your Son. Amen.