

Homily for the Canonisation of St John Gabriel Perboyre by Pope John Paul II

John Gabriel Perboyre, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, wished to follow Christ the evangeliser of the poor, while imitating the example of St Vincent de Paul. Having worked in the ministry of clerical formation, he left France and travelled to China. There he displayed a shining example of the love of Christ for the Chinese people. "I do not know what is reserved for me in the career which is opening up to me. Without doubt a lot of crosses: that is the daily bread of the missionary. And on going to preach a crucified God, what better can one ask for?" (Letter 70). That is what he wrote as he neared China. And it is the Cross of Christ that he found along the roads where he was sent. Through daily imitation of his Lord, in humility and gentleness, he fully identified with him. Following him step by step in his Passion he joined him forever in glory. "One thing alone is necessary: Jesus Christ", he liked to say. His martyrdom is the summit of his engagement to follow Christ the missionary. After torture and condemnation, mirroring in his life an extraordinary resemblance to the Passion of Jesus, he too endured death, death on a cross. John Gabriel had one burning love: Christ and the spread of his gospel. It is through fidelity to this passion that he too was made to join the ranks of the humiliated, of the condemned, and that today the Church can solemnly proclaim his glory in the choir of the saints in heaven.

To the memory of John Gabriel Perboyre whom we are celebrating today we wish to join the memory of all those who have borne witness to the name of Jesus Christ on the soil of China in the course of past centuries. I am thinking particularly of those blessed martyrs whose communal canonisation, desired by so many faithful, could be one day a sign of hope for the Church present in the midst of this nation, to which I remain very near in heart and in prayer.

(Stanislaus Brindley CM, translator)