

Saint Lucy Yi Zhenmei

SAINT OF THE DAY

19_02_2024



This exemplary Chinese catechist, who suffered martyrdom at the age of 47, had demonstrated virtuousness from childhood. Saint Lucy Yi Zhenmei (1815-1862), the last of five children, was born in Mianyang to a family that had recently become Christian through the father's conversion, previously a Buddhist. Attracted by the example of the missionary nuns, at the age of 12 Lucy offered her virginity to God. In the meantime, however, she had been promised in marriage and not knowing how to free herself from the agreement whilst also wishing to respect the vow made, she pretended to be mad

and her prospective husband renounced his plan.

In the years spent in Mianyang, Lucy taught Catechism to young children, because the parish priest had noticed her profound faith and knowledge of Christian doctrine. After her father's death, Lucy moved with her mother and a brother-doctor to Chongqing. Here the priest asked her to help him teach Catechism to women, a task which Lucy embraced with joy, refusing any payment. Later, she moved to the province of Guizhou, where she gained the bishop's admiration and met the French missionary Jean-Pierre Néel (1832-1862), a priest of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, who had left for China in August 1858. Father Néel entrusted Lucy with the women who wanted to learn the teachings of Christ, and the Saint once again proved to be very valuable, both because Chinese was her mother tongue and because her clear witness and faithfulness to God's commandments prompted people to wonder what the source of her happiness was.

At that time, persecutions had resumed by order of Tian Xingshu, a high official from Guizhou, who hated the Christian religion and resented the presence of foreigners in general. Father Néel was arrested on February 18th together with the catechists Martin Wu Xuesheng, John Chen Xianheng and John Zhang Tianshen, who had received Baptism only two days earlier and who had instructed family and friends on the Christian doctrine even during his catechumenate. All four refused to deny Christ, including the recently baptised John Zhang Tianshen, whom the executioner had left for last, hoping he would abjure. "I do not want anything but the eternal inheritance of heaven", replied Saint John Zhang.

On February 18th, Lucy too was arrested, along the same route the four martyrs had been taken for their execution. With various enticements, she was also offered the opportunity to reject the Catholic faith, but she remained steadfast. The following day she was led to the gallows and beheaded. Some brave fellow-Christians managed to recover the bodies of the five martyrs and buried them. Lucy's blood-stained headdress was taken by relatives as a relic and placed on the body of her seriously ill niece, Paula, who was healed immediately. The five martyrs of Guizhou are part of the group of 120 saints, martyred in China between 1648 and 1930 and canonised by John Paul II on October 1st, 2000.