

**Mass for the Inauguration of the Academic Year**

**ACTIVITIES ON THE OCCASION OF THE 75th ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE MARTYRDOM OF BISHOP FRANS SCHRAVEN AND COMPANIONS,  
10.30am October 14, 2012, 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year  
at the parish church of the *Holy Name Jesus*  
Kerkstraat 9, 5871 AP Broekhuizenvorst.**

**Homily: Servant, Missionary, Saint**

Savio HON tai-fai, SDB

Wisdom 7:7-11, Hebrews 4:12-13, Mark 10:17-30

文致和 ( [荷蘭語](#) : Bishop Franciscus Hubertus Schraven,  
C.M. , 1873 年 10 月 13 日 - 1937 年 10 月 9 日 )

Introduction

(A response to the Statement [framed for the occasion] from the Episcopal Conference of Japan, signed by Archbishop Ikenaga, President of the Conference, expressing regrets and an apology for the killing of missionaries by Japanese soldiers in China in 1937, namely Bishop Frans Schraven and his companions. The text is read by Fr. Francis Fukamizu and presented to Archbishop Savio Hon in the beginning of the Mass on Oct 14, 2012)

Response from Mons. Hon:

My dear Brother, Fr. Francis Fukamizu, in Christ's name we receive the framed text that you have just read and we now place it on the altar where we will celebrate the sacrificial death of Christ.

It is in this sacrificial death that Bishop Schraven and his companions took active part and became true witnesses of Christ. In His name they came to China. Lovingly they preached

the Gospel of Christ. Unreservedly they served the people in need, and faithfully they bore witness to God's love, even to the point of shedding their own blood.

They were violently killed, because they heroically protected the women under their care. It was a horrible death. We all feel sorry for them, all the more, since some of us are their relatives, confreres, friends, and fellow citizens.

Today we are all invited to take active part in this Holy Eucharist where Christ is present at work. In this Eucharistic assembly we have just heard the voice from the Church in Japan expressing genuine regrets and sadness at the occurrence of such a tragedy. The same voice reminds us of the power of the Holy Spirit that we received in faith, hope, and charity. Yes, it is with this power that we perpetuate the love of Christ, who is our peace and reconciliation.

My dear brother, Rev. Fr. Fukamizu, it is in Christ that we embrace you and ask you to bring the same peace of Christ we share here today to our Japanese brothers and sisters.

>>>>> Homily

As a Chinese person, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Church in Europe, in particular, in Holland for generously sending her sons and daughters to be missionaries in China. Bishop Schraven and his companions are their esteemed and excellent examples.

Today the liturgy of the word is centered on the wisdom with which we may perceive the power and beauty of God's love.

In the first reading, King Solomon showed his love for wisdom in which every good thing will come. He asked God for the spirit of wisdom so that he might taste the goodness of the Lord.

In the Gospel we heard that the rich young man was somewhat blinded by wealth and could not perceive the profound love shown in the gaze of Christ. Let us ask ourselves: like this young man are we not sometimes blinded by our wealth and not able to perceive the love of God?

The Liturgy of the Word draws our attention and sends us an important message for the year of faith so that we may faithfully respond to the call of Christ. It is indeed a happy coincidence that we also commemorate the wonderful service and the heroic witness of Bishop Schraven and his companions in China.

Today they are sending us an SMS, not by means of a cell phone but through their life and example. It is an SMS regarding being: servant, missionary, and saint.

### **Servant:**

The Young Frans Schraven entered the Novitiate of Lazarist in 1894, not because he was intelligent and talented in music and singing, but because he was chosen by God, as indicated by the Motto of the Vincentians (Lazarist), namely, “*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*”, (He sent me to evangelize the poor).

In 1898, the beatification of Jean-Gabriel Perboyre (+Wu Han 1849) was like an electric shock for him, filling him with an ardent desire to be a missionary in China.

Franz was ordained priest on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1899 and soon afterwards he was sent to China. As custom had it, the newly arrived priest was sent to the old Christian mission of Kiatchoang to study the country’s language and culture. He was also given a Chinese name, Wen Zhi He, which is made up of

three significant characters: Wen, meaning kindness and Zhi He meaning reaching harmony. Putting the three together the name means “reaching harmony and peace through kindness”. In the Chinese classic book of the Middle way, it is said that harmony is the way of heaven, and to establish harmony is the way of humankind.

In fact, to establish peace and harmony with gentleness became his lifestyle in the many different services. He was entrusted with as the bursar of the Vicariate of Zhending, and soon after its Pro-Vicar. Later he was assigned the in-charge of the procure of Shanghai and Tianjin: taking care of incoming and outgoing missionaries, and the financial activities of the Lazarists and the Daughters of Love in all of China.

On 16 December 1920 he was appointed titular bishop of Amyclea and Apostolic Vicar of Zhending. On 10 April 1921 he was ordained Bishop by His cousin, Msgr. Frans Geurts. In all these different services he always proved himself a good and faithful servant, loved by all.

## **Missionary**

Schraven’s missionary zeal was further heightened in China. On January 16, 1923, the first Pontifical Delegate, Archbishop Celso Costantini came to visit Zhengding, a year after his arrival in China. He came to realize that Christianity had already been present there for hundreds of years, initially introduced by the Jesuits. There were many local vocations and the work of evangelization was vibrant. The following day, a Buddhist monk came to Costantini confessing secretly that he had no faith in Buddhism and that he wanted to receive Baptism before death. Yet, for the moment the monk did not do so for fear of losing his offering from the people. Of course the story reflects the urgency and need to sow the seeds of the Gospel in the hearts of the people.

On May 15, 1924, after two years of preparation, as the first pontifical delegate, Archbishop Costantini opened the *first* Synod of the Chinese Catholic Church at Shanghai. 42 bishops, and 5 Prefects Apostolic were present at the Council. Two of the Prefects were Chinese, Odoricus Cheng Hede and Melchior Sun Dezhen. The participants include the Abbot of the Trappists, 13 representatives of dioceses, and several representatives of religious Orders and of the Chinese diocesan clergy. Bishop Schraven was in the first group. After meeting for over a month, the closing ceremony took place at Shanghai's Xujiahui Cathedral on June 12, 1926.

In accordance with the ideas presented in the papal encyclical, *Maximum Illud*, the Council Fathers discussed a unified missionary direction for the Church, which included freedom from any form of Colonialism, and adaptation to the Chinese nation and its people. The Synod affirmed that the primary purpose of the mission is the preaching of the Gospel to the people, and the building up of a local Church with indigenous clergy. The Synod also formulated a complete set of canons concerning missionary work in China, passing motions concerning the training of local clergy and the ordination of Chinese bishops. Later Cardinal Costantini said that every time he recalled the Council of Shanghai his heart was filled with joy.

This first Synod proved to be very fruitful for Bishop Schraven in his missionary activities. It affirmed that missionaries are supposed to be for China and not China for the missionaries. In fact the Synod actually anticipated the general feeling that emerged in the subsequent revolution, that is, that China should belong to the Chinese.

In 1925 the Church in China celebrated the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Lazarists. Celso Costantini wrote a letter to the Superior General of the order, in order to show his appreciation for their wonderful evangelization work in different parts of China. Among them, Zhengding was prominent. The

power station for evangelization in the Vicariate was the so-called Cathedral, a former imperial rest stop, 20 hectares large, around which schools, home for the aged, orphanages, and the Bishop's residence were built. Work and prayer were closely knitted together. The latter being the power source of the former. Because it is not enough to work for Lord, it is also necessary to spend time with the Lord of the work.

From the Cathedral the missionaries went out to 855 mission centers, 86 of which were churches, 461 were chapels and 89 were prayer houses. The 17 Major seminarians and 112 minor seminarians were hopeful sings for a future Chinese clergy. In 450 schools, 285 male teachers and 276 female teachers gave religious education to 6300 pupils. Furthermore, the mission had two hospitals and 4 orphanages which were administered by 43 Chinese brothers of St. Paul, a large group of the Daughters of Love and Chinese sisters of St. Joseph.

In those days there were about 70 thousands Catholics served by 60 priests (40 of which were local) in the Vicariate. Today there are 130 thousand Catholics served by 102 priests, all of them local.

Bishop Schraven modeled the style of his missionary work with the traditional Confucian teaching, namely, "With gentleness the virtuous man cultivates friendship, and with friendship he promotes benevolence". 君子以文會友，以友輔仁。

## **Saint**

The pinnacle of holiness exemplified by Bishop Schraven and his companions was reserved of course for their self-giving to the point of shedding their blood.

Yesterday I heard a beautiful hymn in the Provincial House of the Lazarists during a conference in which two books about Bishop Schraven and his companions were presented. The hymn

was composed in honor of Blessed Jean-Gabriel Perboyre (+Wu Han 1849). The young Frans, as a good cantor, sang one of the strophes in a celebration for the beatification organized in the Motherhouse at Paris. In a mystical way his singing anticipated his missionary call to the point of martyrdom. That strophe runs like this:

*Oh, qu'il est beau d'être martyr. O Saint Martyr, à travers les espaces d'autres soldats s'en iront après toi. Accorde leur de marcher sur tes traces et s'il le faut, de mourir pour leur foi.*

*Oh, how beautiful it is to be a martyr. O Holy Martyr, from all over the world new soldiers of Christ will go out, following your lead. Grant that they may follow your footsteps and if need be, to die for their faith.*

Bishop Schraven's and his companions' violent death was believed to be in retaliation for their categorical refusal to provide the Japanese invaders with young "comfort" women.

They travelled from afar to be missionaries and for years they had served the poor, the orphans, and the young women. In no way could they allow their sheep to be hurt. They preferred death to any concession. After their refusal, nine foreign missionaries were taken away on the same day. They were killed and then their bodies were burned.

Months later, local Catholics found Bishop Schraven's bloodstained cap, a string of rosary beads belonging to one of the other martyrs, a piece of anklebone and some other relics in a Buddhist pagoda, 300 meters from the cathedral.

Last year a crucially important letter was discovered in the Vatican's Secret Archives. It was a correspondence from a Japanese colonel named Yokoyama addressed to the Papal Representative in Beijing at the time. The Colonel wrote about

Schraven and his companions with stunning clarity: “They died as martyrs for their missionary ideal.”

Of the nine martyrs, seven were members of the Congregation of the Mission (Lazarists) – Bishop Schraven, five priests and one seminarian. One was a Trappist monk and one was a layman.

Martyrdom means bearing witness. You cannot bear witness to Christ, unless you have a true and intimate relation with him. In their missionary activities, Bishop Schraven and his companions, had always served and loved the poor and the young women in question. In no way could the missionaries allow any harm to come to those who were under their care. Death rather than concession would be the response to the request of the Japanese soldiers. As Confucius said, “In a good cause we should not lag behind but act bravely”. 當仁不讓

Let us remember that while the rich young man in today’s Gospel passage was blinded by wealth, Bishop Schraven and his companions open our eyes and heal our blindness by an SMS calling us to remember the true meaning of life: being Servant, Missionaries, Saint ...

This SMS was beautifully expressed in a fresco designed by Fr. Jan Haen who worked together on it with some 90 people from your community. After communion we will have a short rite of blessing of the artwork and of the placement of the ashes of our heroes.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen