

MATTEO RICCI: A MODEL OF DIALOGUE AND RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Benedict XVI has sent a Message to Bishop Claudio Giuliadori of Macerata-Tolentino-Recanati-Cingoli-Treia, Italy, for the initiatives planned by the diocese - among them a Jubilee Year - to commemorate the fourth centenary of the death of the Jesuit Fr. Matteo Ricci, who died in Beijing, China on 11 May 1610.

Matteo Ricci, who was born in Macerata on 6 October 1552, was, the Pope writes, "gifted with profound faith and extraordinary cultural and academic genius". He "dedicated long years of his life to weaving a profound dialogue between West and East, at the same time working incisively to root the Gospel in the culture of the great people of China. Even today, his example remains as a model of fruitful encounter between European and Chinese civilization".

"In considering his intense academic and spiritual activity, we cannot but remain favorably impressed by the innovative and unusual skill with which he, with full respect, approached Chinese cultural and spiritual traditions. It was, in fact, this approach that characterized his mission, which aimed to seek possible harmony between the noble and millennial Chinese civilization and the novelty of Christianity, which is for all societies a ferment of liberation and of true renewal from within, because the Gospel, universal message of salvation, is destined for all men and women whatever the cultural and religious context to which they belong.

"What made his apostolate original and, we could say, prophetic, was the profound sympathy he nourished for the Chinese, for their cultures and religious traditions", the Holy Father adds. Ricci was likewise "a model of dialogue and respect for the beliefs of others" and "made friendship the style of his apostolate during his twenty-eight years in China".

The Jesuit remained faithful to this style of evangelization to the end of his life, "using a scientific methodology and a pastoral strategy based, on the one hand, on respect for the wholesome customs of the place, which Chinese neophytes did not have to abandon when they embraced the Christian faith and, on the other, on his awareness that the Revelation could enhance and complete" those customs. As the Fathers of the Church did in the time of the encounter between the Gospel and Greco-Roman culture, the author of the "Treatise on Friendship" undertook his "farsighted work of enculturation of Christianity in China by seeking constant understanding with the wise men of that country".

"Following his example, may our own communities, which accommodate people from different cultures and religions, grow in a spirit of acceptance and of reciprocal respect", the Holy Father concludes.

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