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Domingo

... the story of a martyr

Ferrer Cassidy, O.P.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Father Cassidy was assigned to the Chinese missions in the 1930's. We invited him to write about Father Chang who died recently in a Chinese Communist prison.

In its familiar Spanish vesture, his Christian name was easily transliterated into Chinese; three simple characters did it: DO - MING - O, and Domingo was what he *always* went by. This is unusual; Chinese are seldom called by either baptismal name or even given name; instead a customary nickname is the usual thing—and these, in China, are not always complimentary.

He was baptized about the age of thirteen or fourteen by Father Curran, the first of the American Dominican missionaries to arrive in

Foochow with Brother James Murphy. The Father had asked Bishop Aguirre of that city to recommend a native contractor to repair a house; Chang Lao-Pan was the man. He often came to work accompanied by his only son whose "classic style," or name, was Cheng Neng. Soon missionary and only-son were friends; then Cheng Neng was baptized Dominic, doubtless in the old cathedral there on the banks of the river Min, where the hundreds of boat-people, good Christians indeed, could paddle right up to the church door when the tide was high.

He was born in Foochow on February 12, 1910. He helped in different ways in the various mission projects of Kienow, the territory in northwest Fukien which the Dominicans from St. Joseph's Province took over in 1922 from their Spanish brethren of the Holy Rosary Province of the Philippines. The youthful Chang's Chinese education had already begun. With that peculiar gift that Father Curran had for inspiring Chinese young men with thoughts of the priesthood, it wasn't long before Dominic Chang was planning to study for the priesthood in the Order of St. Dominic.

And here we note a sufficiently high hurdle to be crossed. Dominic was not only the first-born, but he was the only son of the elder Chang who, like Israel of old that loved Joseph more than all the others because he was the son of his old age, had had this son long after the usual time. Moreover, the hopes of the elder Chang for progeny and the carrying on of the family name—all-important as this was considered to be—this all devolved upon this his only son; and yet, contrary to all custom, the father and mother signed the papers allowing their only son to begin studies leading up to the priesthood.

Studies! In China these were precarious things indeed! In the larger cities some Middle-Schools still carried on as a missionary enterprise, and Vicars Apostolic still had some seminaries open. First, Dominic went to a neighboring Province, Kiangsi; here the dialect was southern Mandarin—and Dominic's language was Fukienese, and everyone knows the folk-sayings which tell how far down the scale the Chinese regard these Fukien dialects! A short time later it was decided that Sacred Heart school in Shanghai would be better; here French was spoken. In 1931 he came to Providence College. Another language all around, other customs, other ways! On August 16, 1934 he made his first profession at St. Rose's in Kentucky and then went to River Forest for philosophy. His classmates remember the enthusiasm he

displayed as he joined them in the American sports—so foreign to the Chinese of that day. At last Ordination day came: May 31, 1940. Father Curran at that time was pastor of St. Peter's Church in Memphis, Tennessee. And so he was archpriest at the first Solemn Mass of the young man of Foochow he had baptized not too many years ago.

Father Chang was on his way back to China when World War II broke out. He was shunted to Sumatra or some other South Sea isle, but finally landed in Manila. There, he was able to come and go and be of assistance to the American Dominicans; several Fathers from the United States were teaching at Santo Tomas University and were removed by the Japanese to a concentration camp. It was a delicate line the young Father Chang had to walk. Several times he was arrested, first by one side, then the other, but he managed to give a good account of himself.

In 1949 word came that signalled the end for our missionary work in China. The Americans were compelled to leave. Father Dominic was given the option: to stay or to go. He chose to stay. The night before the last two of the Americans departed Father Dominic left his church at the river gate to stay the night at the mission where the American Dominicans were packing their few belongings, getting ready to depart in the morning. At dawn, as the two foreigners crossed the bridge, they looked around to see the rear-guard of the departing army being fired upon by the in-coming Red army. A chapter in our missionary history was sadly closing, but not for Dominic—yet. His parting message to the departing brethren was: no letters, no direct communication or help . . . otherwise things would be worse.

Several times he was able to make his way to Foochow where a few of the Fathers still had a bit of freedom; they used to walk down alongside the canal to the cathedral where devotions to our Lady of the Rosary were the mainstay of the Foochow Catholics. Father Chang did not stay in the house of his American Dominican brothers. It wouldn't do. However, he too made his way to the cathedral, and as he knelt alongside the prie-dieu where his friends were kneeling, he was able to let them know how things were going. After several years under Communist arrest, these Fathers too were escorted from the country. Father Chang was alone, up-country. From that time on little is known about his life.

For two years he was in prison, so we hear. Then it was alternating between labor camps, working on the railroad, and bouts with stomach

trouble which sent him to the hospital—whatever that might mean in those times under that regime. There was a time, it seems, when he was not the only priest in the labor camps; loyal priests who refused to go along with the attempt of the Red government to set up their own kind of Catholic Church sang hymns as they worked, and they would not be silenced. Perhaps this afforded an opportunity for confession and Holy Mass, but we do not know. For the most part of his time in captivity, he had no priest-companion to share his burden.

Father Chang's place of labor was frequently changed; his good disposition even then made him too many friends, and so his overseers moved him quite often. One of the Catholic women managed to keep his Shanghai relatives informed now and then about the Father's condition, and the messages were relayed to the United States, but the information is meager. Occasional requests would come: "Send me some shoes, send me some medicine."

Father Chang had two sisters who many years ago had migrated from Foochow to Shanghai where they lived with their families. His parents, after their young son entered the seminary, moved up from Foochow to Shanghai to live with one of the married daughters. They were all baptized before they died. One of the daughters of Father Dominic's sister is now a Dominican sister at St. Mary of the Springs in Columbus, Ohio. Several years ago her father got all the travel papers needed to make the journey from Shanghai to Fukien, to visit Father Chang. It wasn't to be; the papers read "Foochow" and the Father had been transferred to another spot. The most constant contact, it seems, was the one maintained by the simple Chinese Christian woman already mentioned.

However, a cousin in Foochow seemed to have some source of information, because it was she who sent word first to Shanghai that Father Chang had died in the prison camp. Then word came from the Christian woman who had been in touch all along; and finally another cousin—I do not know the name—who lived in the neighborhood of the camp visited the place and saw the dead priest. At about six o'clock on the evening of April 2, 1967, Father Dominic Chang—Domingo—died.

He goes to join the white-robed ranks of those who were faithful to death. With Father Luke Devine, killed some years ago in the same mission, with Father Sebastian Gillespie, with Sister Hildegarde and Sister Leocadia. The land of China, so unhappy now, furnishes them with a lonely resting place until the glorious resurrection.