

Lives of Saints

St Augustine Zhao Rong

1746 - 1815

Feastday: 9th July



“The precepts
of the Lord
give joy to the
heart.”

*(Pope John Paul
reflecting on the
experience of
Augustine Zhao Rong
and his 119
companions)*



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While Catholicism had been tolerated by some Emperors in the preceding centuries, Emperor Kia-Kin (1796-1821) of China published numerous and severe decrees against it. The first was issued in 1805. Two edicts of 1811 were directed against those among the Chinese who were studying to receive sacred orders, and against priests who were propagating the Christian religion. One decree, proclaimed in 1813, forgave voluntary apostates from every chastisement, that is, it pardoned Christians who spontaneously declared that they would abandon their faith. All others who persevered were to be dealt with harshly. As a result, a number of Christians underwent martyrdom in this period.

One of these was Blessed John Gabriel Taurin Dufresse, a member of the Paris Foreign Mission Society, and a Bishop. Monsignor Dufresse was arrested on 18 May 1815, taken to Chengdu, condemned and executed on 14 September 1815.

I was one of the soldiers who escorted Monsignor Dufresse from Chengdu to Beijing, and I was moved by his patience. As a result, I asked to be numbered among the neophytes, that is I asked to be baptised. Once baptised, I was sent to the seminary and, not long after, was ordained a diocesan priest. I worked in the Su-Tchuen province. However, I was myself arrested for my faith and work. When under arrest, I had to suffer the most cruel of tortures. As a result of my injuries, I died in prison in the same year, that is, in 1815. I was beatified in May 1900.