



NEWS REPORT

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New Shanghai bishop 'barred from ministry'

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SHANGHAI - Newly ordained Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai failed to show up for his first Mass yesterday at St. Ignatius Cathedral after telling the congregation at his ordination that he would step down from the local and national offices of the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA).

Local Church sources said Bishop Ma was taken away by several unidentified persons shortly after his ordination on Saturday and is now in Shenshan, on the outskirts of Shanghai, where the diocese established a Marian shrine and seminary.

He has freedom of movement there but Chinese authorities have restricted him from exercising his episcopal ministry, the sources said.

The sources said it was widely understood that authorities were displeased by Bishop Ma's speech during his ordination, in which he said he would step down from the government-sanctioned local CPA and give up his membership in the national body to devote himself entirely to his ministry.

Bishop Ma is the first "open" bishop in recent years to announce publicly that he would give up his duties with the CPA.

Chinese officials "looked very serious when walking out of the cathedral," one source said, adding that three tables reserved for government officials at the banquet following the ordination were left empty.

Bishop Ma's absence caused considerable grief during Sunday Mass yesterday, with Father Joseph Gu Zhangjun visibly upset as he presided over the Mass in his stead.

"Hundreds of Catholics who packed the cathedral yesterday were also very sad," the source said.

Priests and nuns of the Shanghai diocese received a text message from Bishop Ma yesterday evening, saying he felt "mentally and physically exhausted" after his ordination.

"I need a break and have made a personal retreat. With the consent of Bishop Jin [Luxian], I am at the side of Our Lady of Sheshan," the message read.

A Shanghai priest said Bishop Ma is now having a rough time. "It is painful, but is good for the conscience of the Church in China. His witness is an encouragement for our Catholics, so we can only pray for him."

Across China, many Catholics called for prayers and fasting for Bishop Ma on the internet today, the feast of Chinese Martyrs.

Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher of the Hong Kong diocese's Holy Spirit Study Centre, said episcopal ordination is a joyous occasion in the Church, but the Chinese government has openly assaulted the Church with "fierce and barbarous" acts.

He also condemned the government's interference on Bishop Ma's civil rights to participate in religious activities.

Another Church observer who requested anonymity called for the government to respect Bishop Ma's conscience and not to impose political pressure on him.

"He has set a good example for other bishops in the country that they should be a spiritual leader for their priests, nuns and laypeople rather than political leaders holding CPA posts," the observer said.

Pope Benedict XVI's letter to the Church in China in 2007 stated that the aim of the CPA in upholding the independence of the China Church was incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

Government-sanctioned Church authorities have not yet published any report on Bishop Ma's ordination, although they published reports of an illicit episcopal ordination in Harbin that took place Friday.