

16th General Meeting, Feb. 12, 2019

Rev. Giovanna Giampietro, (恩保德神父) PIME and Mr. Damian Lau Chung Yan (劉松仁) were our Guest Speakers at our 16th General Meeting. They spoke to us about the “Matteo Ricci” musical; Rev. Giampietro is the brainchild of the musical and Mr. Lau co-produced and directed it.

[Download for a summary of the talk]

The Guest Speaker Rev. Giovanni Giampietro, PIME and Mr. Lau Chung Yan are known to all members and needed no introduction. Rev. Fr. Giampietro was ordained 60 years ago and was sent out to Hong Kong immediately. Rev. Fr. Giampietro gave a brief historical background on Matteo Ricci.

(A) Historical Background

Matteo Ricci was respected more by non-Catholics than Catholics. He was ostracized by the Catholic Church for a long time because of his acceptance of old Chinese customs. This “mis-interpretation” of old Chinese customs of respecting their ancestors was rectified at Vatican Council II, which proclaimed that all religious have good quality (“the wisdom of God”) and all men have the “freedom of religious beliefs”. Pope Francis went as far as to proclaim “Universal Brotherhood” in the recent official visit to the Middle East. Indeed, the source of saving grace comes from the same God through different channels, like water coming from different water pipes. Matteo Ricci was too far ahead of his time – about 500 years too early.

Matteo Ricci was ordained a Jesuit and was sent out to the Far East as a missionary. He spent 5 years in India and then spent 1 year in Macao. He realized that the correct path for evangelizing China would be from the top down. Converting the Emperor to Christianity would be better than converting 1000 peasants. Matteo Ricci attempted evangelization by undergoing three phases:-

- (i) Phase I – attempting to convert the Confucian scholars and the intellectual elite. He spent 10 years studying Chinese in Siu Hing (肇慶). The designation of God as 天主 (from Confucian writing) and 上帝 came from Matteo Ricci.
- (ii) Phase II – in order to be accepted and assimilated into Chinese life,

Matteo Ricci often dressed as a Buddhist monk.

(iii) Phase III – started to write in Chinese. He wrote more than 200 books in Chinese – the first book was on Friendship

朋友之先 - 宜教

朋友之後 - 宜信

(Early Acquaintance – learn; Close friendship – believe)

His writing in Chinese reached Korea, Japan and Vietnam and influenced the people there. He also believed that friendship is superior to family relationship – one has a choice with the former but not the latter.

Matteo Ricci went to seven cities before reaching Beijing, the heart of the country – including Macao, Siu Hing(肇慶), Siu Kwan (韶關), Tien Chun (天津), Nanking (南京) and Peking (北京).

This discourse on Matteo Ricci by Rev. Fr. Giampietro was followed by a short talk by Mr. Lau Chun Yan on the writing and staging of the musical “Matteo Ricci”. Mr. Lau knew Rev. Fr. Giampietro when he was 6 years old, sixty years ago. He stopped going to church for 40 years until he was recruited by Rev. Fr. Giampietro to be the Director for the production of the musical Matteo Ricci. This started in 2015 with monthly meeting on this musical. Serious work began in the latter half of 2016 and many setbacks and difficulties were surmounted almost miraculously. During this time, his mother was very ill and he received a dream from God that “she would be better in HIS hands than in your hands”. The cast was all professional actors. The formation of a charitable foundation to stage the musical came in March 2018. Mr. Lau Chun Yan devoted two years of his life to this project – but this is really not a human project but a divine project.

This moving tale was followed by sharing by Serrans Laurence Ho, Richard Tan and Denis Chang.