*News Release*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ST. ANNE’S SHRINE TO WELCOME NEW STATUE TO SERVE AS PLACE OF PRAYER AND REMEMBRANCE IN OPIOID CRISIS

FALL RIVER — Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., will celebrate a 6:30 p.m. Mass in St. Anne’s Shrine, Fall River, on Wednesday, July 26, the Church’s Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne. In what has become tradition, St. Anne’s Parish offers a special Mass on that day as the culmination of its observance of the feast day of its patroness. This year, though, the celebration will include something extra which the parish hopes will come to serve as spiritual support in the current opioid crisis.

 Bishop da Cunha will bless and dedicate a statue of St. Mark Ji Tianxiang, a 19th-century Chinese martyr who spent most of his adult life trying to overcome an addiction to opium. The statue of the saint will be placed in the Shrine to serve as special place for visitors to come and pray, asking for the intercession of St. Mark Ji Tianxiang for those who are suffering from drug addiction or for those who have died from it. A special place will be designated for persons to leave prayer cards from those who have succumbed to addiction.

The story of this fairly recent saint and the suggestion for a statue of him in the Shrine was brought to St. Anne Parish Administrator Father David C. Deston Jr., by a local doctor who treats drug addiction.

Father Deston thought it made sense, and the parish agreed. “Drug addiction is a growing problem causing much pain in our society today,” Father Deston explained. “We turn to counseling and medicine to treat it, but we also need to pray. As a church, it’s our responsibility to provide a place to pray, to support people and to help them carry their cross.

He believes the new statue will be the first-ever to depict St. Mark Ji Tianxiang. The 42-inch high statue, to be made of fiberglass, is being created by New Bedford-based sculptor Erik Durant, who coordinates the Fine Arts program at Bristol Community College. Its cost is being covered by private donors. The project required a great deal of research by Durant in order for him to produce an authentic depiction of the Chinese saint as no photos or sketches of him exist.

St. Mark Ji Tianxiang was a respected Catholic doctor in 19th-century China. When he developed a violent stomach ailment, he began treating himself with opium and soon became addicted to the drug. He prayed for relief and sought counsel from a priest, but eventually was barred from receiving the sacraments of the Church because at the time his addiction was regarded as gravely sinful and scandalous.

Some thirty years later, in 1900, while still addicted and prohibited from the sacraments, he along with other Catholics in his village were rounded up as part of the persecution of Christians during the Boxer Rebellion. He still considered himself a Catholic and refused to renounce his faith at his trial; he was then murdered. It is said that he sang the litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary as he was led to his execution. On October 1, 2000, he was canonized by Pope John Paul II as one of the Martyred Saints of China.

The statue of St. Mark Ji Tianxiang will be placed in the St. Joseph’s Shrine area within St. Anne’s. It will soon be joined by a another statue, still in the making in Italy, of St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan Friar who was killed by lethal injection at a concentration camp during World War II.

All are welcome to attend the July 26 Mass and dedication.

St. Anne’s Shrine is open daily from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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For further information, please contact Father David C. Deston Jr., Parochial Administrator of St. Anne’s Parish at 508-493-4740.