



MIRACULOUS MEDAL

*Shrine*  
REFLECTIONS

Script by Mr. George Whelan  
Video by Fr. Frank Sacks, CM

SAINT JOHN GABRIEL PERBOYRE —  
Example of Vincentian Zeal for the Foreign Missions



*To the viewer's right, next to the Miraculous Medal Shrine,  
is a large painting portraying a French Vincentian Missionary,  
St. John Gabriel Perboyre (1804-1840) <sup>1</sup>*

Following the French Revolution, Napoleon in 1801 brought religious peace to France. The country was still Catholic, especially rural France. Pierre Perboyre and his wife Marie on a small farm in Puech near Cahors typified the French peasant's faith. God blessed them with eight children. Three sons became priests in the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians), and two daughters entered the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.

The eldest son of Pierre and Marie, John Gabriel, was born on the 6th of January 1802. In 1816 John Gabriel accompanied a younger brother, Louis, to a high school in Montauban that had been started by their uncle, Fr. Jacques Perboyre, C.M., to prepare young men for the seminary. In the Spring of 1817, his teachers noting John Gabriel's intelligence and piety suggested he remain with his brother and continue his studies. Though willing to return home if needed on the farm, John Gabriel wrote to his father that he believed that the Lord was calling him to the priesthood.

From his earliest days in the seminary, John Gabriel had longed for the China mission. In 1832, however, his superiors appointed him a novice director in the Vincentian Motherhouse. The departure of some Vincentians to China in 1835 renewed his missionary longing. Poor health stood in the way, but finally his doctor saw the voyage to the Orient as a possible cure. Five months at sea brought John Gabriel to Macao where he studied Chinese.

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<sup>1</sup> George Whelan created this script. Except for his personal comments in **BOLD PRINT** the script was taken verbatim from <http://www.amm.org/saints/jgperboyre.aspx> and <https://cmglobal.org/vincentiana/cgi-bin/library.cgi?e=q-000-00--0vincenti--00-0-0--0prompt-10---4---ddc--0-11--1-en-50---20-about-themes--00031-001-1-OutfZz-8-00&a=d&c=vincenti&cl=search&d=HASHab459111eea7120919a7ad>.

In December of 1835, Father Perboyre, along with several missionaries, set sail from Macao in a Junk. Since the Chinese law forbade the entry of Christian missionaries, the Christian captain and crew disguised themselves as merchants and smuggled John Gabriel on to the mainland of China.

Following a five-month overland journey to the Vincentian mission center in Ho-nan, Father Perboyre suffered a severe attack of fever that forced him to rest for three months. But he was able enough to continue his mastering of the Chinese language. In the company of two Chinese Vincentians he spent the years 1837 and 1838 reanimating the faith in Catholic villages by preaching, catechizing and administering the sacraments. Some of the Vincentian mission areas were desperately poor and John Gabriel shared the meager fare of his flock.

Saint John Gabriel Perboyre exhibited a special devotion to the Blessed Mother early in his priesthood. In the letter in which he announces to his uncle the good news of his being sent to China, he adds that his superiors told him his assignment on the Feast of the Purification, which led him to believe that he owed much, in this matter, to the Blessed Virgin. In the later years of his life, his love for Mary took on the form of devotion to the Miraculous Medal.

A reading of Perboyre's letters makes it evident that he and others brought the medal to China very soon after the apparitions in Paris and, through it, fostered devotion to Mary. John Gabriel knew Fr. Aladel, St. Catherine Laboure's spiritual director, quite well. He writes to him in 1838, recounting with enthusiasm the effects that the medal is having in China.<sup>53</sup>

Already in 1833, while still in Paris, he had written to his uncle: "The medal of which I have spoken with you is the one that in 1830 was revealed by the Blessed Virgin to a seminarist of the Sisters of Charity." He promises to send his uncle some of the medals, saying that thousands have been distributed in France and in Belgium and that numerous miracles, healings, and conversions have been worked. His letters to his brother Antoine and to his uncle over the following two years make frequent references to the medals and to miracles. He often encloses medals for others to distribute and promises to send them a printed account of the miracles.<sup>55</sup>

From Jakarta he writes to the Superior General, Fr. Salthorgne, that during a fierce storm that had taken place during their journey, when the waves were like mountains, the missionaries prayed: "O Mary, conceived without sin." He adds that no sooner had they raised their hands toward the Star of the Sea than the tempest subsided.

In China he was an eager distributor of the Miraculous Medal. In a letter written shortly before his capture he tells of a young woman who had been brought to him from one of the Christian communities and who had been afflicted by a mental disorder for eight months. The people told him that she was anxious to go to confession. Though he doubted the usefulness of hearing her confession, he did so out of compassion. In parting, he gave her a Miraculous Medal. From that day on she began to be healed. Within four or five days she was completely changed.

**This effect of the Miraculous Medal in such a foreign setting as China in the 1800s is striking. The power of the message of a loving acceptance and support of Mary our Mother to all those of good faith was attractive and special to these new Christians. We should all remember when we first encountered the story of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and felt this sacred power of salvation and support.**

**We can only imagine these same feelings among the Chinese converts so long ago.**

For more than a century, China outlawed Christianity and had a death penalty on all Europeans attempting to spread the faith. Authorities often overlooked this law, but in 1839 the Viceroy of the province of Hu-pei began a persecution and used his local Mandarins to obtain the names of priests and catechists in their areas. In September 1839, the Mandarin of Hu-pei, where there was a Vincentian mission center, sent soldiers to arrest the missionaries. Warned of the danger by some Christians, the priests scattered in different directions. John Gabriel hid in a bamboo forest, but a beaten and tortured catechist led the soldiers to him.

Frequently tortured in prison, Father Perboyre refused to betray his faith and his associates. In May 1840 his case went to the Emperor where he was found guilty of preaching Christianity and condemned to death. John Gabriel Perboyre was executed on September 11, 1840, in the Chinese custom of being tied to a stake and triple strangled. Andrew Fong, a generous and valiant catechist who had aided Father Perboyre in his imprisonment, retrieved his body and buried it in the Christian cemetery where Blessed Francis Regis Clet, C.M. was buried. Both their remains now repose in the chapel of the Vincentian Motherhouse in Paris, France.

**This ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom for spreading the faith in the service of others is beyond our comprehension. Yet, we know of sacrifices that we all make in relationships as spouses, parents, or just as friends for the benefit of others out of love. We need to see these selfless acts as small participations in the vastly different sacrifice of someone like Jesus and Saint John Gabriel Perboyre.**

The heroic suffering and death of John Gabriel led to his beatification in 1889. And in recent times, Pope John Paul II canonized him as Saint John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M., on June 2nd 1996.

In our prayer this week we ask St. John Gabriel to intercede for us.

*We pray:*

*Saint John Gabriel  
please help us to live our lives  
with the same dedication and selfless sacrifice  
with which you led your life.*

*May we help others as you helped so many  
in your missionary work.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

Our next reflection will focus on the Shrine dedicated to *St. Vincent de Paul*