



ST. MARK JI TIANXIANG

DEDICATED PHYSICIAN AND PATRON SAINT OF
PERSONS WITH ADDICTION DISORDER

1834 – 1900

“Surely, I wait for the LORD; who bends down to me and hears my cry, draws me up from the pit of destruction, out of the muddy clay, sets my feet upon rock, steadies my steps, and puts a new song in my mouth, a hymn to our God.” **PSALM 40:2-4A**

As we reflect on the ways we attend to the whole person in our ministry, consider the story of St. Mark Ji Tianxiang (tyen-sheyahng), whose commitment to his patients and devotion to his faith are valuable reminders that we are all more than a collection of symptoms.

St. Mark Ji Tianxiang was a dedicated physician, acupuncturist and respected leader in his Christian community of what is present-day Hebei Province, China. He offered care to patients regardless of their ability to pay and demonstrated a devotion to his faith that eventually led to his martyrdom during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. However, he was not without his own health struggles. After becoming ill with a violent stomach ailment, he became addicted to opium, which had been prescribed to treat him. Despite his attempts to cure himself, his community saw his illness as a moral failure. He was denied reception of the Eucharist for nearly 30 years. Nevertheless, Tianxiang remained steadfast in his faith. Even in the face of death, he remained confident in God’s accompaniment and saving grace despite his illness of being addicted.

It is tempting to view Ji’s story of addiction and martyrdom as a metaphor for the ways in which we ourselves might be addicted (legitimately or metaphorically), or even called to be martyrs. Worse still would be to view his addiction experience through the same lens of “moral failure” as that of his family and friends. We now know well that addiction disorder is to be understood as an illness rather than a lack of strength or spiritual fortitude. Thus, St. Mark Ji Tianxiang’s example of accompaniment to his patients, to his family and friends with whom he was martyred and to himself as he imperfectly worked toward his own healing can serve as a reminder that not only are we complex spiritual and emotional beings — more than a collection of symptoms to be treated — but that we are also called to work together with God to achieve wholeness.



- ✦ Consider an encounter where you defined the other by a fraction of their whole personhood (a symptom, diagnosis, personality characteristic, etc.). How could you have better honored that person’s inherent dignity?
- ✦ In what ways are you called to be honest with yourself about your own fragile human condition?
- ✦ Like St. Mark, how can you invite God into your struggles so that you may care for your whole self without judgment, even the places you might avoid or try to hide?

O HOLY MYSTERY OF LOVE,

St. Mark Ji Tianxiang’s radical accompaniment and understanding of the complexities of the human condition remind us that we are more than a collection of symptoms. We are called to work with You, in our own imperfect way, to achieve wholeness.

*Recommit us today to serve you earnestly
With our hands, our eyes, our thoughts, and our hearts.*

All you Holy Men and Women: pray for us.

AMEN.