

## **Cardinal Joseph Zen solemnizes Peter ToRot Anniversary in Rabaul Japan's Bishops apologize on behalf of their country**

*By Abp. Francesco Panfilo, SDB – Rabaul*

Cardinal Joseph Zen SDB of Hong Kong, Papal Envoy to the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Blessed Peter ToRot, arrived at Rabaul airport from Port Moresby on Friday 6 July, together with the Papal Nuncio to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, Archbishop Santo Gangemi, and his Secretary, Fr. Emmanuel Fadeyi. They were officially welcomed by a delegation from the archdiocese and the provincial government.

On Saturday, 7 July, feast of Blessed Peter To Rot, Card. Zen presided the solemn celebration at ToRot's village of Rakunai, assisted by the Papal Nuncio with Rabaul Archbishop Francesco Panfilo SDB, retired Archbishop Karl Hesse MSC, the Archbishop of Port Moresby and President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, John Ribat MSC, and Bishop Rochus Tatamai of Bereina a member of the family of Peter ToRot. Over 40 priests concelebrated the solemn liturgy. Present were also the Deputy Governor for East New Britain, Hon. Boniface Setavo, and former Governor General, Sir Paulias Matane with his wife.

In his homily Card. Zen stressed the theme of the family and Christian marriage. He pointed at Peter ToRot as a model of faithfulness to the Gospel. He mentioned the fact that this year 2012 is of particular importance for Rabaul and East New Britain: 130 years ago (1892) the first Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) landed at Matupit Island, while 100 years ago (1912) the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (FMI) Sisters were founded at Rabaul.

Before the end of the Mass, the Archbishop of Rabaul read a letter from the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan and dated 22 June 2012: "On the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Blessed Peter ToRot, - wrote Bishop Leo Jun Ikenaga SJ - I would like to convey a message of apology to all of you in Papua New Guinea from Japan, which is responsible for his death"; and after recalling the ministry and the martyrdom of Peter ToRot, he concluded: "Japan is not a Christian country now and then. Catholics and Protestants in total account for only 0.09% of its population. Therefore the views on humanity and human life are totally different from those of Christian nations. The Japanese military during World War II did not share the Christian view on marriage at all. Putting aside the difference in religions and ideologies, it is true that Japan inflicted enormous damage from a humanitarian perspective on many nations including Papua New Guinea. Japan deprived Peter ToRot of his precious life by wielding inhumane power at will. I convey my heartfelt apology for such conducts on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the life of Blessed Peter ToRot. As a Japanese bishop, I would like to offer a Mass and prayers on the anniversary day."

A sincere and sustained applause by the clergy and the people gathered at the Rakunai basilica of Peter ToRot greeted the message of bishop Ikenaga.

After the Mass, fifty seven catechists, who have exercised their ministry for over twenty five years in the Archdiocese of Rabaul, were recognized with a beautiful certificate of the Apostolic

Blessing from Benedict XVI and a Rosary offered by the Pope. Forty catechists were at hand to receive their award, the rest will receive it in their own parishes.

In the afternoon the youth of Kokopo Deanery staged the life and the death of the Blessed martyr, while pilgrims continued to flock to the Shrine of Peter ToRot.