

# Shanghai Catholics report seeing smoke from prominent Marian statue

SHANGHAI, China - Some Catholics in the Shanghai Diocese said they have witnessed smoke emerging from a bronze statue of Mary holding the Infant Jesus - Our Lady of Sheshan - atop the Minor Basilica of St. Mary.

The incidents took place during the afternoons Oct. 1-5, and each episode lasted one to three hours, local Catholics told the Asian church news agency UCA News. None of the Catholics could offer any explanation for what they saw around the 3.8-meter (12.5 feet) statue.

Based on a one-minute video clip provided to UCA News by a layperson, something resembling black smoke appears to emerge from the back of the statue. This is visible even though the video was shot from the ground up toward the statue atop a 38-meter bell tower.

A similar video posted Oct. 5 can also be found on a mainland Catholic Web site (<https://bbs.ccbbs.org.cn/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=77&extra=page%3D2>), with the caution: "The church has not verified or recognized this incident."

Fang Linger volunteers as a guide for visitors at the basilica. She told UCA News that she saw the smoke coming out of the statue Oct. 2 around 2 p.m. after visitors questioned her about it.

"I told them I didn't know what had happened, but was certain it could not be a fire, because there is only the statue right on top of the basilica," she said.

She learned other people observed the same phenomenon on other dates in early October during China's weeklong National Day holiday, when the number of visitors increases at the Sheshan basilica.

"There could be reasons and explanations, but it definitely is not human-made," she

said.

Some local Catholics said they believe the phenomenon was a Marian apparition, and they have prayed at the basilica more often since then.

According to local Catholics, some seminarians, priests and government officials climbed up to see the statue after reports circulated. They quoted officials as saying the smoke was actually “swarms of insects or bees.”

A priest who saw the smoke for days told UCA News he believes it was a miracle.

“There was nothing on the bronze statue or at its stone-made base,” he said.

The priest, who preferred anonymity, said the Shanghai Diocese has not conducted any scientific investigation or follow-up, while religious officials said the case was not a miracle and no investigation is needed.

Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai, 92, told UCA News Nov. 18 that he had not heard or received reports about the smoke sightings. The bishop, who suffers from heart disease, usually stays at his house next to St. Ignatius Cathedral, about an hour from Sheshan by car.

A senior priest of the Shanghai Diocese, who refused to be named, told UCA News that church authorities did not take up the case because they knew of no precedent for apparitions in the form of smoke and there was no clear message to urge people to pray and do penance.

“The diocese wants to keep it low-profile to avoid curious people crowding around the basilica, disrupting normal pilgrimages there,” he said.

A Hong Kong-based church scholar told UCA News that while he could not comment on the phenomenon, smoke is symbolic for Catholics, because it is used during the election of a pope.