

## Reflection Monday Week 25 - The Korean Martyrs 2021

**St Andrew Kim Taegŏn, Paul Chong Hasang, and companions.** For centuries, Korea was closed to all outside influences, contact with foreigners being forbidden. No missionaries went there. A number of laymen visiting the Beijing embassy discovered books about Christianity and were converted; possibly in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The first known baptism was Ni-Seoung-Houn baptized with the name Peter in Beijing in 1784. The first known martyrs are Paul Youn and James Kouen, who in 1791 refused to offer sacrifice on the death of their relatives. During the next century, over ten thousand Korean Christians were executed. For most of this period the church in Korea had no priests it was entirely lay. In 1794 the first priest to visit Korea, a Chinese, found a community of 4,000 Catholics who had never seen a priest. He was executed in 1801. Two further Chinese priests sent there met a similar fate. Thirty years later, at the request of Korean Catholics, Pope Leo XII established an Apostolic Prefecture in Korea, and a new missionary phase began. Among the first missionaries was a French priest (Paris Foreign Mission Society) who arrived in 1836. He was beheaded three years later. Many others followed. Andrew Kim Taegŏn, the first Korean priest, who secretly trained in Macao, entered Korea in 1845 and was executed in 1846, together with his father. A lay apostle, St Paul Chong Hasang, and many others perished at the same time. A further major persecution occurred in 1866. The 103 Korean martyrs celebrated today were mostly lay men and women: some married, some not; some old, some young, some even children. *“The Korean Church is unique because it was founded entirely by laypeople. This fledgling Church, so young and yet so strong in faith, withstood wave after wave of fierce persecution. Thus, in less than a century, it could boast of 10,000 martyrs. The death of these many martyrs became the leaven of the Church and led to today’s splendid flowering of the Church in Korea. Even today their undying spirit sustains the Christians of the Church of Silence in the north of this tragically divided land.”* – Pope John Paul II at the canonization of the Korean Martyrs, May 6, 1984.

Wisdom reminds us that *“The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, and are now in peace.”*