

Reflection Wednesday Week 34 Vietnamese Martyrs 2021

The evangelisation of Vietnam began in the 16th century. Two Apostolic Vicariates were set up in 1659. There are about 6 million Catholics in Vietnam, 10% of the population. Growth came because the seed of Faith was watered by the blood of its martyrs – missionary and local clergy, and the laity. They shared in the apostolic work and faced death in witness to the Gospel. During the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries 53 decrees were signed by the lords and emperors launching one persecution of Christians after another. About 130,000 Christians were killed in Vietnam in these persecutions. Except for **Andrew Dũng-Lạc**, most of their names have been lost, but their memory lives on in the Catholic community. 117 of these heroes were canonized by Pope John Paul II on 19th June 1988.

More than half of those canonised were lay faithful although they would have been the vast majority of the other martyrs who died for the faith. It is a stark reminder of the immense importance and immeasurable value of the contribution of the laity in any and every faith community. We all need the prayers and graces of the Vietnamese martyrs to help and guide us in living our faith with dedication and commitment today. As a Church we are founded on the faith of the apostles but that foundation has been cemented and made fast by the lives and faith of the laity down through the years. The synodal journey suggests that Pope Francis, the Church itself, wishes not only to recognise this valuable contribution of the laity to the life and growth of the Church but to celebrate, affirm and encourage it. We need to share our experience of faith together for this to happen. The whole Church wants your help in this!