

## Reflection Tuesday week 25 The Korean Martyrs 2022

For centuries, Korea was closed to all outside influences. All contact with foreigners was forbidden. No missionaries went there. On an annual embassy visit to Peking some discovered Christian books and were converted. The actual date is unknown but most probably early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The first known baptism is Ni-Seoung-Houn who was baptized Peter when he visited Peking in 1784.

The first known martyrs are Paul Youn and James Kouen, in 1791. They refused to offer sacrifice on the death of their relatives. During the next century over 10,000 Korean Christians were executed with great cruelty and many others perished.

During this period the church in Korea had no priests. It was an entirely lay church. In 1794 the first priest to visit Korea, a Chinese, discovered a community of 4,000 Catholics who had never seen a priest. He was executed in 1801. Two more Chinese priests also had a brief ministry. Thirty years later, at the request of the Korean Catholics, Pope Leo XII established the Prefecture Apostolic of Korea, opening a new missionary phase. The first was a French priest from the Paris Foreign Mission Society, entering the country in 1836 he was beheaded three years later. Many others followed. Andrew Kim Taegŏn, the first Korean priest, was secretly trained in Macao. Entering Korea in 1845, he 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.

In all, 103 Korean martyrs are celebrated today: 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 their canonization, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1984.*