



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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[Multimedia]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: The apostolic zeal of the believer. 14. Witnesses: Saint Andrea Kim Tae-gon

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In this series of catecheses, we place ourselves in the school of some of the saints who, as exemplary witnesses, teach us apostolic zeal. Let us recall that we are talking about apostolic zeal, which is what we must have in order to proclaim the Gospel.

Today we are going to find a great example of a Saint with the passion for evangelisation in a land far away, namely the Korean Church. Let us look at Saint Andrew Kim Tae-gon, a martyr and Korea's first priest. But, the evangelisation of Korea was done by the laity! It was the baptized laity who transmitted the faith. There were no priests because they had none. They came later, so the first evangelisation was done by the laity. Would we be capable of something like that? Let's think about it: it is interesting. And he, Saint Andrew, was one of the first priests. His life was and remains an eloquent testimony of zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel.

About 200 years ago, the Korean land was the scene of a very severe persecution: Christians were persecuted and annihilated. At that time, believing in Jesus Christ in Korea meant being ready to bear witness unto death. Specifically from the example of Saint Andrew Kim, we can draw out two concrete aspects of his life.

The first is the way in which he had to meet with the faithful. Given the highly intimidating context, the saint was forced to approach Christians in a discreet manner, and always in the presence of other people, as if they had been talking to each other for a while. Then, in order to confirm his interlocutor's Christian identity, Saint Andrew would implement these devices: first, there was a previously agreed upon sign of recognition: you will meet with this Christian and he will have this sign on his outfit or in his hand, after which he would surreptitiously ask the question — but under his breath — “Are you a disciple of Jesus?” Since other people were watching the conversation, the saint had to speak in a low voice, saying only a few words, the most essential ones. Thus, for Andrew Kim, the expression that summed up the whole identity of the Christian was “disciple of Christ”. “Are you a disciple of Christ?”— but in a soft voice because it was dangerous. It was forbidden to be a Christian.

Indeed, being a disciple of the Lord means following him, following his path. And the Christian is by nature one who preaches and bears witness to Jesus. Every Christian community receives this identity from the Holy Spirit, and so does the whole Church, since the day of Pentecost (cf. Vatican Council ii, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 2). And it is from this Spirit that we receive passion, passion for evangelisation, this great apostolic zeal. It is a gift of the Spirit. And even if the surrounding context is not favourable — like the Korean context of Andrew Kim — the passion does not change. On the contrary, it becomes even more valuable. Saint Andrew Kim and other Korean believers have demonstrated that witnessing to the Gospel in times of persecution can bear much fruit for the faith.

Now let us look at a second concrete example. When he was still a seminarian, Saint Andrew had to find a way to secretly welcome missionaries from abroad. This was not an easy task, as the regime of the time strictly forbade all foreigners from entering the territory. This is why it had been so difficult to find a priest that would come to do missionary work, before this: the laity undertook the mission.

One time — think about what Saint Andrew did — one time, he walked in the snow, without eating, for so long that he fell to the ground exhausted, risking unconsciousness and freezing. At that point, he suddenly heard a voice, “Get up and keep walking”! Hearing that voice, Andrew reawakened, and caught a glimpse of something like the shadow of someone who was guiding him.

This experience of the great Korean witness makes us understand a very important aspect of apostolic zeal; namely, the courage to get back up when one falls. But do saints fall? Yes! Indeed, from the earliest times. Think of Saint Peter: he committed a great sin, but he found strength in God's mercy and got up again. And in Saint Andrew, we see this strength. He had fallen physically but he had the strength to go, go, go to carry the message forward.

No matter how difficult the situation may be — and indeed, at times it may seem to leave no room

for the Gospel message — we must not give up and we must not forsake pursuing what is essential in our Christian life: namely, evangelisation. This is the path. And each of us can think: “But how can I evangelize”? Well look at these great ones, and think about your own small context. Do we think about it in relation to our own small context: evangelising the family, evangelising friends, talking about Jesus — but talking about Jesus and evangelising with a heart full of joy, full of strength. And this is given by the Holy Spirit. Let us prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit this coming Pentecost, and ask him for that grace, the grace of apostolic courage, the grace to evangelize, to always carry the message of Jesus forward.

APPEAL

Today is World Day of Prayer for the Catholic Church in China. It coincides with the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, venerated and invoked at the Shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan in Shanghai. On this occasion, I wish to offer an assurance of my remembrance and express my closeness to our brothers and sisters in China, sharing in their joys and hopes. I turn my thoughts especially to all those who suffer, pastors and faithful, that in the communion and solidarity of the universal Church they may experience consolation and encouragement. I invite everyone to raise their prayers to God, that the Good News of Christ crucified and risen may be proclaimed in its fullness, beauty, and freedom, bearing fruit for the good of the Catholic Church and all of Chinese society.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from England, Scotland, India, Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan, Canada and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

Lastly as usual, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly, and to newlyweds. Today is the feast of Our Lady venerated under the title of “Mary Help of Christians”. May Mary help you, dear young people, to strengthen your fidelity to Christ each day. May she obtain comfort and serenity for you, dear elderly and dear sick people. May she encourage you, dear newlyweds, to translate the commandment of love into your daily lives. The feast of Mary Help of Christians is a Marian vocation very dear to Don Bosco: a greeting and a [special] thought to the Salesian Family, giving thanks for all they do for the Church.

And we all continue to feel saddened for tormented Ukraine: there is so much suffering there. Let

us not forget them. Let us pray today to Mary Help of Christians that she may be close to the Ukrainian people.

And I offer my blessing to all of you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we now turn to Saint Andrew Kim Taegon, the first native priest of Korea and a martyr for the faith. At a time of fierce persecution, Saint Andrew courageously sought out the scattered members of his flock who, for fear of arrest, were forced to keep their identity secret. As a young seminarian, Andrew aided missionary priests from abroad, who covertly entered the country to minister to its people. He endured great hardships for the sake of the Gospel. Once, amid a long trek through the snow, he fell to the ground exhausted and risked dying of exposure. Suddenly he heard a voice saying: "Get up and keep walking!" He realized that, in his witness to the Gospel, he was not alone, and that the Lord would never forsake him. In the end, his perseverance in following Christ and serving his people led to his death as a martyr. Inspired by the example of Saint Andrew Kim Taegon, may we persevere in our baptismal calling to be missionary disciples, sharing the joy of the Gospel with others, trusting in the strength that the Lord unfailingly grants us.