

“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path” (Ps 119:105). “The person who, when hearing God’s word, embraces and understands it ... is filled with light and becomes a visible lamp so that others may see the light. Those who have been granted knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom must make them known.”ⁱ

Word about God and the word of God sustained the Korean church in its infancy. When the Japanese invaded Korea in 1592, some Japanese soldiers were Christians.ⁱⁱ Learning about Christianity, even from an unwelcome invading military force, some Koreans were awed at hearing the Good News and chose baptism. However, it was difficult for the faith to take root because Korea was isolated and able to keep the outside world at bay.

In 1777, the Jesuits in China spread the faith into Korea through literature.ⁱⁱⁱ Educated Koreans wanted to know more about Jesus who had risen from the dead and saved humanity from the oppression of sin. Some scholars traveled to China to study Christianity under Jesuit missionaries. Through that initial encounter with the Gospel, the first Korean Christians returned to their homeland to share the faith.^{iv} Thousands converted to Christianity even in the absence of a more formal church with priests. “When a Chinese priest managed to enter secretly a dozen years later, he found 4,000 Catholics none of whom had ever seen a priest. Seven years later there were 10,000 Catholics.”^v

In time, the early Christian converts managed to send their young into China for advanced study in the faith. “The first native Korean priest, Andrew Kim Taegon was the son of Christian converts. Following his baptism at the age of 15, Andrew traveled 1300 miles to the seminary in Macao, China. After six years of intense study and preparation, he managed to return to his country through Manchuria. That same year he crossed the Yellow Sea to Shanghai and was ordained a priest.”^{vi}

In addition to the normal duties of a priest in preaching the Good News, teaching others love God and neighbor, and the celebration of Mass and the sacraments, Father Andrew helped to set up a clandestine way for more missionaries to come and serve the growing Christian population in Korea. Father Andrew enlisted the help of Paul Chŏng Ha-sang as a catechist. Arrested, tortured, and martyred, neither would recant the faith. “No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light” (Lk 8:16).

In 1984, Pope John Paul II canonized Father Andrew, Paul, “98 Koreans and three French missionaries who had been martyred between 1839 and 1867.”^{vii} In 2014, Pope Francis beatified an additional 124 Korean martyrs. These faithful martyrs unto death “call out to us to put Christ first and to see all else in this world in relation to him and his eternal Kingdom. They challenge us to think about what, if anything, we ourselves would be willing to die for.”^{viii}

ⁱ Gadenz, Pablo T.. The Gospel of Luke. Pp. 159-160.

ⁱⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saints-andrew-kim-taegon-paul-chong-hasang-and-companions

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} catholicnewsagency.com/news/30299/pope-beatifies-124-korean-martyrs-praising-their-witness-to-christ

^v Ibid, Franciscan Media

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Pope Francis, Ibid Catholic News Agency.