

"Are you a disciple of Christ?"

In his 24 May general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal, speaking about St. Andrew Kim Tae-gon.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In this series of catecheses that we are undertaking, we place ourselves in the school of some of the saints who, as exemplary witnesses, teach

us apostolic zeal. Let's 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 of the passion for evangelization in a land far away, namely the Korean Church. Let us look at the Korean martyr and first priest St Andrew Kim Tae-gon.

But, the first Korean priest: you know something? 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. Then, later... but the first evangelisation was done by the laity. Would we be capable of something like that? Let's think about it: it's interesting. And this is one of the first priests, St Andrew. His life was and remains an eloquent testimony of the proclamation of the Gospel, the zeal for this.

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 even unto death. Specifically from the example of St Andrew Kim, we can draw out two concrete aspects of his life.

The first is the way he used 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 awhile. Then, to confirm the Christian identity of his interlocutor, St 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.” “And after that,

he would surreptitiously ask the question—but all this under his breath, eh?—“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. So, 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 there.

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. Conc. Vat. II, Decr. Ad gentes, 2). It is from this Spirit that we receive the

passion, the passion for evangelisation, this great apostolic zeal; it is a gift of the Spirit Who gives. And even if the surrounding context is not favorable—like the Korean context of Andrew Kim—it does not change; on the contrary, it becomes even more valuable. St 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, St Andrew had to find a way to secretly welcome missionary priests from abroad. This was not an easy task, as the regime of the time strictly forbade all foreigners from entering the territory. That's why it had been, before this, so difficult to find a priest that could come to do missionary work: the laity undertook the mission.

One time—think about what St Andrew did—one time, he was walking 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, walk!” Hearing that voice, Andrew came to his senses, catching a glimpse of something like a shadow of someone 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 St Peter: he committed a great sin, eh? But he found strength in God's mercy and got up again. And in St 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, evangelization. This is the path. And each of us can think to themselves: “But what about me, how can I evangelize?” But you look at these great ones and you consider your smallness, we consider our littleness: 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 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.
Thank you.

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