

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 272

a perfect example of love for Christ and one's brothers

Seoul (AsiaNews) – The Universal Church and the Korean Church *"need the witness of the Korean Martyrs now more than ever. Theirs is a perfect and eternal witness that explains the need for Christ in our lives and the love we feel for our brothers. It is the reason for remembering who the martyrs of every country were and what they did in their life. It is also the reason for publishing the lives of Korean martyrs."*

These are the words used by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea to present the biographies of 103 holy martyrs canonised by John Paul II in 1984. What follows is the complete text of the introduction.



St Chông Chông-hye Elisabeth
St Yu So-sa Caecelia
St Chông Ha-sang Paulus

After having published a brief history of the Catholic Church in Korea..... we are pleased to present to our readers the brief stories of the lives of the 103 Korean Martyr Saints, who were canonized by Pope John Paul II at the ceremony of canonization that took place May 6, 1984, in Yoido Plaza, Seoul, Korea.

As Pope John Paul II said it, from the thirteen-year-old Peter Yu Tae-chol to the seventy-two-year-old Mark Chong, men and women, clergy and laity, rich and poor, ordinary people and nobles – many of them descendants of earlier unsung martyrs – they all gladly died for the sake of Christ.

"The Korean Martyr Saints have borne witness to the crucified and risen Christ. Through the sacrifice of their own lives, they have become like Christ. 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the reign of heaven'(Mt. 5:10). The truth of these words of our Saviour, the truth of the Beatitudes, is manifested in the heroic witness of the Korean Martyrs," Pope John Paul II said.

As an introduction to the stories of the individual Korean martyr Saints we present here the **“Brief Resume of the Lives of the 103 Korean Martyr Saints”** that was presented at the ceremony of their canonization.

"God, who desired the salvation of all peoples, planted the seeds of the Catholic Faith in Korea, in a remarkable manner and caused them to blossom. The Christian community first began to take shape when Yi Sung-hun started to study Christian doctrine by himself and was eventually baptized and given the name Peter in 1784. In the beginning, because of their belief in God, the first Korean Christians were persecuted repeatedly, rejected by their own families, and suffered the loss of not only their social rank but even their fundamental human rights. Nevertheless, despite persecutions, the faith continued to spread.



The Christian community in Korea, which had begun without any priest pastor, was finally given the assistance of two Chinese priests. But their ministry was short-lived, and another forty years passed before the Paris Foreign Mission Society began its work in Korea with the arrival of Father Mauban in 1836. Until his arrival, the Christian community was moved by an ardent desire for the graces of the sacraments. A delegation was selected and sent to Beijing on foot, 750 miles, in order to beg the Bishop of Beijing, with tears in their eyes, to send them bishops and priests.

The same appeal was made to the Holy Father in Rome. Serious dangers awaited the missionaries who dared to enter Korea. The bishops and priests who confronted this danger, as well as the lay Christians who aided and sheltered them, were in constant threat of losing their lives.

In fact, until the granting of religious liberty in Korea in 1886, there was a multitude of "disciples who shed their blood, in imitation of Christ Our Lord, and who willingly submitted to death, for the salvation of the world" (*Lumen Gentium*, 42). Among those who died as martyrs and who were canonized, there were eleven priests and ninety-two lay people.

Together with their spiritual pastors, there were men and women, young and old, learned and unlearned, without any distinction of social class. They were bound together by their common faith to witness that God calls all people, without exception, to the life of perfection.



St Yu Chin-gil Augustinus
St Yu Tae-chöl Petrus

Bishop Laurent Imbert and ten other French missionaries were the first Paris Foreign Mission Society priests to enter Korea and to embrace a different culture for the love of God. During the daytime, they kept in hiding, but at night, they travelled about on foot attending to the spiritual needs of the faithful and administering the sacraments.

The first Korean priest, Andrew Kim Tae-gon, prompted by his faith in God and his love for the Christian people, found a way to make the difficult task of a missionary entry into Korea. However, just thirteen months after his ordination he was put to death by the sword when he was just 26 years old and the holy oils of ordination were still fresh on his hands.



**St Andrew Kim Tae-gon
St Paul Chong Ha-sang**

Paul Chong Ha-sang, Augustine Yu Chin-gil and Charles Cho Shin-chol had made several visits to Beijing in order to find new ways of introducing missionaries into Korea. Since the persecution of 1801, there had been no priest to care for the Christian community. Finally, they succeeded in opening a new chapter in the history of the extension of the Church in Korea with the arrival of a bishop and ten priests of the Paris Foreign Mission Society.

Among the martyrs honoured were fifteen virgins, including the two sisters Agnes Kim Hyo-ju and Columba Kim Hyo-im who loved Jesus with undivided heart (*I Cor.7, 32-34*). These women, in an era when Christian religious life was still unknown in Korea, lived in community and cared for the sick and the poor. Similarly, John Yi Kwang-hyol died a martyr's death after having lived a life of celibacy in consecrated service to the Church.

More than 10,000 martyrs died in persecutions, which extended over more than one hundred years. Of all these martyrs, seventy-nine were beatified in 1925. They had died in the persecutions of 1839 (Ki-hae persecution), 1846 (Pyong-o persecution) and 1866 (Pyong-in persecution). In addition, twenty-four martyrs were beatified in 1968. All together, 103 martyrs were canonized on May 6, 1984 – on the shores of the Han River and in view of the martyrs' shrines at Saenamto and Choltusan, where they went to their eternal reward.”



23.04.10

item 273

“...I offer to God... my young life...”

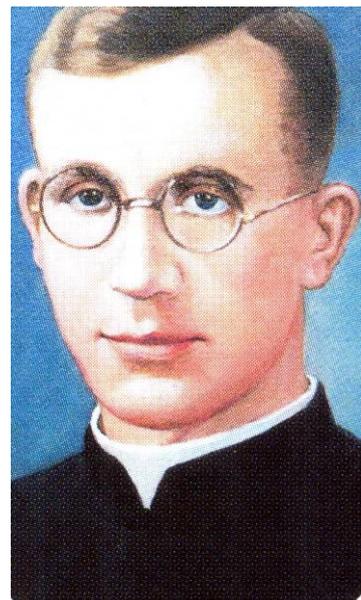
A member of the Polish Province Franciszek Bryja was born on 31 May 1910 at Rajcza, in the region of Krakow, he was ordained a priest on 11 July 1938 and died at the concentration camp in Dachau on 04 May 1942. The Cause of his Beatification was officially opened together with that of other martyrs on 17 September 2003 in Warsaw. Fr Henryk Kietliński sac is the Postulator.

After ordination Fr Bryja lived in Warsaw and studied classical philology at the university while engaged in part-time pastoral work. It is worth remembering that during the German occupation universities in Poland were closed, however, people courageously studied clandestinely.

Fr Bryja was arrested by the Nazis on 13 September 1940 as a hostage in place of another priest who subsequently presented himself and was arrested, however neither of the two was released. Initially Fr Franciszek was placed in a very tough prison known as Pawiak in Warsaw. On an occasion when he had been interrogated one of the Nazi soldiers remarked to another “This man (Bryja) does not appear to me to be very

guilty, but since he is here we must detain him". Fr Franciszek himself heard this and he later repeated it to his confreres. He was moved from Pawiak to the concentration camp at Auschwitz on 23 November 1940 and shortly afterwards to the camp at Dachau. He was assigned a number, prisoner 22196. There he formed part of the group of prisoners known as 'the invalids', who were given lighter work but within a short period of time were condemned to death in the gas chambers.

Fr Bryja foresaw all that awaited him. The day before he died the camp authorities told 'the invalids' to prepare themselves for a journey to another, better organized camp, where there would be a basket making factory, however he did not believe this. He took leave of his two Pallottine confreres, Fr Stefan Treuchel and Fr Jan Wroński, who were also prisoners in the camp and, according to Fr Stefan, said the following: "Our jailers fear a rebellion and this is why they say that they are going to take us to a better organized camp where we will be employed weaving wicker baskets, another (of the guards) assured us that we will be taken to a rest home. I do not believe what they say and therefore in these few moments which are left to me I want to tell you of my last will and testament."



He spoke briefly to them regarding his material possessions which he had inherited from his parents, then after a moment of silence, he continued:

"When news of my death reaches you please remember what I am going to tell you now. In this moment I offer to God and to the Queen of Apostles my young life, the first years of my priesthood, my dreams and the hopes which have not yet been realized, I offer all my heart and my soul; I make this offering so that the Catholic faith may increase and develop in Poland and for the growth of the Pallottine Polish Province".

He died in the gas chamber on 04 May 1942 just short of his 32nd birthday and four years of priesthood.

The memory of Fr Bryja lives on in the Polish Pallottines as an example of generous service to God and neighbour, and of fidelity to a vocation which was crowned with martyrdom. The General Chapter of the Pallottines in 1947 recognized his heroic life and accepted that the process for his beatification be pursued. It is noteworthy that after his death three of his nephews, all sons of his sister, discovered their vocation to the priesthood and two of them became Pallottines and the third a diocesan priest.

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sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented...

on #142 Thank you for the strong missionary message in both articles last week. The recognition that we are all called to pray and to reach out – whether to other countries, in our own country or to our family and friends.

CS 20.10.14

Many thanks for the inspiring narration of silent witness of the soldiers with Rosaries narrated by Fr Vyacheslav Grynevych sac.

MK 19.10.14