



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO KOREA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,

SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THAILAND

(MAY 2-11, 1984) MASS FOR THE CANONIZATION OF KOREAN MARTYRS **HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL**

//Yoido Place - Seoul

Sunday, 6 May 1984 "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory"? (*Luc. 24, 26*)¹. These words, taken from today's Gospel, were spoken by Jesus as he was going from Jerusalem to Emmaus in the company of two of his disciples. They did not recognize him, and as to an unknown person they described to him all that had happened in Jerusalem in these last days. They spoke of the Passion and death of Jesus on the Cross. They spoke of their own shattered hopes: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (*Luc. 24, 21*). These *hopes* were *buried* with the death of Jesus. The two disciples were downhearted. Even though they had heard that the women and the Apostles, on the third day after his death, had failed to find the body of Jesus in the tomb, nevertheless they were completely unaware that he had been seen alive. The disciples did not know that at that precise moment *they were actually looking at him*, that they were walking in his company, that they were speaking with him. Indeed, their eyes were kept from recognizing him (*Ibid. 24, 16*)². Then Jesus began to explain to them, from Sacred Scripture, that it was precisely through suffering that the Messiah had to reach the glory of the Resurrection. The words alone however did not have the full effect. Even though their hearts were burning within them while they listened to this unknown person, nevertheless he still remained for them an unknown person. It was *only during the evening meal*, when he took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (*Ibid. 24, 31*), but he then disappeared from their sight. Having recognized the Risen Lord, *they became witnesses for all time of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. Through them, through all the Apostles, through the men and women who were witnesses of the life and death of Jesus Christ, of his Gospel and Resurrection, *the truth about him spread* first to Jerusalem, next to all Judea, and then to other countries and peoples. It entered into the history of humanity.³ *The truth about Jesus Christ also reached Korean soil*. It came by means of books brought from China. And in a most marvellous way, divine grace soon moved your scholarly ancestors first to an intellectual quest for the truth of God's word and then to a living faith in the Risen Savior. Yearning for an ever greater share in the Christian faith, your ancestors sent one of their own in 1784 to Peking, where he was baptized. From this good seed was born *the first Christian community in Korea*, a community unique in the history of the Church by reason of the fact that it was founded entirely by *lay people*. 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 already boast of some ten thousand martyrs. The years 1791, 1801, 1827, 1839, 1846 and 1866 are forever signed with the holy blood of your Martyrs and engraved in your hearts. Even though the Christians in the first half century had only two priests from China to assist them, and these only for a time, they deepened their unity in Christ through prayer and fraternal love; they disregarded social classes and encouraged religious vocations. And they sought ever closer union

with their Bishop in Peking and the Pope in faraway Rome. After years of pleading for more priests to be sent, your Christian ancestors welcomed the first *French missionaries* in 1836. Some of these, too, are numbered among the Martyrs who gave their lives for the sake of the Gospel, and who are being canonized today in this historic celebration. The splendid flowering of the Church in Korea today is indeed the fruit of the heroic witness of the Martyrs. Even today, their undying spirit sustains the Christians in the Church of silence in the North of this tragically divided land.⁴ Today then it is given to me, as the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter in that Apostolic See, *to participate in the Jubilee of the Church on Korean soil*. I have already spent several days in your midst as a pilgrim, fulfilling as Bishop and Pope my service to the sons and daughters of the beloved Korean nation. Today's Liturgy constitutes *the culminating point* of this pastoral service. For behold: *through this Liturgy of Canonization the Blessed Korean Martyrs* are inscribed in the list of the Saints of the Catholic Church. These are true sons and daughters of your nation, and they are joined by a number of missionaries from other lands. They are your *ancestors*, according to the flesh, language and culture. At the same time they are *your fathers and mothers in the faith*, a faith to which they bore witness by the shedding of their blood. From the thirteen-year-old Peter Yu 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. Listen to the last words of Teresa Kwon, one of the early Martyrs: "Since the Lord of Heaven is the Father of all mankind and the Lord of all creation, how can you ask me to betray him? Even in this world anyone who betrays his own father or mother will not be forgiven. All the more may I never betray him who is the Father of us all". A generation later, Peter Yu's father Augustine firmly declares: "Once having known God, I cannot possibly betray him". Peter Cho goes even further and says: "Even supposing that one's own father committed a crime, still one cannot disown him as no longer being one's father. How then can I say that I do not know the heavenly Lord Father who is so good?". And what did the seventeen-year-old Agatha Yi say when she and her younger brother were falsely told that their parents had betrayed the faith? "Whether my parents betrayed or not is their affair. As for us, we cannot betray the Lord of heaven whom we have always served". Hearing this, six other adult Christians freely delivered themselves to the magistrate to be martyred. Agatha, her parents and those other six are all being canonized today. In addition, there are countless other unknown, humble martyrs who no less faithfully and bravely served the Lord.⁵ The Korean Martyrs have borne witness to the crucified and risen Christ. *Through the sacrifice of their own lives they have become like Christ* in a very special way. The words of Saint Paul the Apostle could truly have been spoken by them: We are "always carrying in the body *the death of Jesus*, so that *the life of Jesus* may also be manifested in our bodies . . . We are always being given up *to death for Jesus' sake*, so that *the life of Jesus* may be manifested in our mortal flesh". The death of the martyrs is similar to the death of Christ on the Cross, because like his, theirs has become *the beginning of new life*. This new life was manifested not only in themselves - in those who underwent death for Christ - but it was also *extended to others*. It became the leaven of the Church as the living community of disciples and witnesses to Jesus Christ. "*The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians*": this phrase from the first centuries of Christianity is confirmed before our eyes. Today the Church on Korean soil desires in a solemn way *to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the gift of the Redemption*. It is of this gift that Saint Peter writes: "You were ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ". To this lofty price, to this price of the Redemption, your Church desires, on the basis of the witness of the Korean Martyrs, *to add an enduring witness* of faith, hope and charity. Through this witness may Jesus Christ be ever more widely known in your land: the crucified and risen Christ. *Christ, the Way and the Truth and the Life*. Christ, true God: the Son of the living God. Christ, true man: the Son of the Virgin Mary. Once at Emmaus two disciples recognized Christ "in the breaking of the bread". On Korean soil may ever new disciples recognize him *in the Eucharist*. Receive his body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine, and

may he the Redeemer of the world receive you into the union of his Body, through the power of the Holy Spirit. May this solemn day become *a pledge of life and of holiness* for future generations. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and is living in his Church today. "Yes it is true. The Lord has risen". Amen. Alleluia! © Copyright 1984 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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