
Pope at audience: “I offer my closeness to our brothers and sisters in China”

“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?”, **Pope Francis** remarked off-text in his catechesis for today’s general audience, devoted to the figure of the Korean martyr and first priest St Andrew Kim Tae-gon. During the concluding greetings to the Italian-speaking faithful, the Pope sent out yet another appeal for “the martyred Ukraine” that he entrusted to the protection of Saint Mary Help of Christians. The Pope recalled the World Day of Prayer for the Catholic Church in China, which 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”, Francis said, extending a special thought “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”, is the Pope’s appeal. **“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”**, Francis remarked in today’s catechesis: “Every Christian community receives this identity from the Holy Spirit, and so does the whole Church, since the day of Pentecost. It is from this Spirit that we receive the passion, the passion for evangelisation.” “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”, the Pope said. St. Andrew, Francis pointed out, “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”, the Pope remarked. He added off text: “believing in Jesus Christ in Korea meant being ready to bear witness even unto death.” “Given the highly intimidating context – Francis went on - 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, 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’.”

Having “the courage to get back up when one falls.”

This, for the Pope, is a very important aspect of apostolic zeal.” “But do saints fall?”, Francis asked in unscripted remarks: “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.” Francis recalled an episode: “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. 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.” “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”, Francis called on the faithful. “This is the path”, he continued off text: “each of us can think to themselves: ‘But what about me, how can I evangelize?’ **“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”, Francis said in his concluding, unscripted remarks.

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