

SEPTEMBER 26, 2021: 26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



This past week we celebrated the feast of Andrew Kim Taegon and his companion martyrs. This celebration always brings to my mind how the Church in Korea was started. Yi Byeok was a scholar in Korea in the late 18th century. He was part of what today we might call a book club. This club was studying traditional Chinese classics and books concerned with European knowledge. Among the topics these latter books covered were aspects about Catholicism. Yi Byeok became intrigued by what he read as did other members of the group. Another person in the group was named Yi Seung-hun. And he was traveling to China with his father on a diplomatic mission. Yi Byeok urged Yi Seung-hun to find a Chinese priest to

learn more about the faith and get baptized. Yi Seung-hun did just that. When he returned to Korea, he had with him more books and objects of devotion. This would be the beginning of the Catholic Church in Korea. The Church would grow from this modest beginning as both men shared what they believed. In time, more and more people came into the Church and there were no missionaries or ordained ministries involved in this process. It was simply the action of a few lay people who heard the teachings of Christ and had their hearts touched by what they read. It truly shows what the power of grace can accomplish. A persecution of Catholics began in 1801 as the ruling powers considered Christianity an affront to Korean culture. Both Yi Byeok and Yi Seung-hun would die for the faith. It was not until 1836 that the Church would send missionaries to Korea. By the time the first priests arrived, they discovered a thriving Catholic community already existed.

We discover in this story the true aspects of what catholicity really means. The purpose of the Church is to continue the mission of Christ. This gives a foundation from which the Church will grow and continue. The Church grew in Korea for the simple reason that its teachings made sense to these people. The more they read and understood, the more they wanted to be part of Christ and his Church. It is also a clear reminder to us that all people are called to be part of the Church. It is like the story of Cornelius who was a centurion and gentile. He was what the Jews would call a God-fearing man which meant he was not Jewish, but still strove to be true to God's law. He had a vision where an angel told him to call Peter and bring him to his house. Peter, at that same time, had a vision that he would recognize was God telling him to go to the house of Cornelius. The problem was that Jews generally did not enter the homes of gentiles since they were considered unclean. But 'while [Peter] conversed with [Cornelius], he went in and found many people gathered together and said to them, "You know that it is unlawful for a Jewish man to associate with, or visit, a Gentile, but God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean..." Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.'" (Acts 10:28-29;34-35)

Our faith is not intended for any particular group of people, but truly the whole world. As Catholics, we cannot make arbitrary distinctions such as race, nationality, culture or whatever to divide us. Rather, those differences are intended to bring us together. The reality is that God can speak his truth in and through all ages, languages, cultures, and the like. The Church is intended to challenge that which will lead people away from Christ and to make use of all that can allow Christ to be seen. No culture or language or time can fully or adequately speak about Christ.

The message of Christ, by its very nature, is a universal message since it is the only message that can lead the whole of humanity to salvation. Therefore, each and every baptized person is required to bring the message of Christ to the world. We must make use of all that is at our disposal that will allow people to truly know and understand who Jesus is. And that means adapting the message without compromising the truth. It is about allowing the truth to speak in a way that will make sense to people. Thus, the Church can lead people towards true liberation. True freedom can only be found in Christ since Christ alone can free us from our sins. And it is only when we reject sin that we can begin to understand how the world is truly intended to be ordered. A life without Christ is a life without meaning. A life without Christ is a life that has no true grounding or foundation. A life without Christ by its very nature will be one that leads in a direction of damnation. And since Christ came to save all of humanity, it only makes sense that his message would have universal appeal.

The power of the Church is not discovered in a sense of uniformity that we all speak things in the same way. It is that the universal truth of Christ can be translated into every race, language, culture, or nationality. It is a message that brings hope, joy, and love into the lives of all peoples. The Church is not universal because it is big or exists in all places. It is universal because of Christ and its mission to continue Christ's mission of salvation to the world.

We will look next week at the Church being apostolic.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".

Fr. Brian