St. Andrew Kim Taegon and Companions

The first three Commandments instruct us in how we are to love God. For most of us, our love for God does not entail any unbearable sacrifices, but instead requires everyday acts of holiness and faithfulness to God's laws. For some, however, love of God and faithfulness to his Church has meant sacrifi cing their lives as martyrs. Saint Andrew Kim, along with many other Korean Catholics, was true to God and his faith even when it meant he would be persecuted and killed for it.

Saint Andrew Kim Taegon

Christianity came to Korea during the Japanese invasion in 1592, most likely brought by Christian Japanese soldiers. Because Korea refused almost any contact with the outside world, evangelization was difficult. However, around 1777, Christian literature obtained from Jesuits in China made its way into Korea, and the number of Koreans who learned about Christianity grew. This group of Korean Catholics formed a home church and met in secret, to avoid persecution, and without any priests to celebrate the Sacraments. Religious freedom did not come to Korea until 1883; until then, Christians could be sentenced to death for practicing their faith. Andrew Kim Taegon (1821–46) was the first native Korean to be ordained to the priesthood. Along with ministering to the Catholics in Korea, Andrew was assigned the responsibility to arrange for missionaries to enter the country without being discovered. Unfortunately, he was caught by the authorities and arrested. Rather than renounce his faith, Andrew faced torture, and was later beheaded. Andrew was just 25 years old when he sacrificed his life in witness to his faith.

Persecution of Christians in Korea occurred throughout the 19th century. One hundred and three Christians were martyred.

Among them were a few bishops and priests, but most were laypeople.