

Homily: Sept. 20, 2021

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

Today we commemorate Korean Saints Andrew Tae-gon, Paul Chong Ha-Sang and 100 more companion martyrs, tortured and killed in the middle 1800's. The Korean Catholic Church is unique in that it began not through international missionaries, but by Korean diplomats, who discovered Christianity in China and proclaimed it Korea. Nonetheless, Korean Catholics suffered several waves of persecution. Today there are nearly 6 million Catholic Koreans in South Korea, and perhaps around 10,000 in North Korea, still suffering various levels of persecution or limitations. South Korean Catholics are 11% of the entire population and still increasing, though challenged, too, by aging and a waning of church attendance as in many modern countries of the world. Yet they and we are to be a light of Christ shining in the world. We know that our light flickers and dims at times, and so we call out, Lord Have Mercy.

In the first reading from Prophet Ezra, we heard how God sent his life and light through King Cyrus, inspiring him to generously help the exiled Israelites return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple and restore their religious community there. What a marvelous moment! The light of that event shines until today as an inspiration. King Cyrus' respect for the people of God was concretely realized through his decree calling all his citizens to help the surviving exiles with silver, gold, goods, cattle and extra gifts and free-will offerings. The responsorial Psalm captures this era of God's goodness well, "The Lord has done marvels for us. We were like people dreaming, . . . filled with laughter."

In the Gospel Jesus reminds his disciples and us, that if we have received his light of life, we must let it shine most helpfully so that it reveals secrets still hidden. Jesus didn't say whether those are good or bad secrets. I think he meant both. The secrets and mysteries of God's goodness and love must be revealed as the key to life. But the hidden bad stuff must come to light, too.

We know that the ungodly stuff, when hidden, turns into a demon that only destroys life and love more quickly. Our dear church has clearly learned that hard lesson these past decades of her dealing with previously dark secrets regarding sexual abuse, financial mismanagement, abuse of native children and also internal racism.

Jesus promises that the truth, as painful as it may be, will set us free. Therefore, Jesus the Christ calls us to continue the work of letting his light reveal both kinds of secrets, so that ultimately all people in Korea, Jerusalem, the United States, and in all places, will be freer to help one another worship and live in renewed communities, to enjoy life to the full, just as God intended.

THE LORD HAS DONE AND STILL DOES MARVELOUS THINGS THROUGH HIS PEOPLE!