

## **Pentecost Sunday June 5, 2022**

The story of the Catholic Church in Korea is unique. In most other countries, Christianity was introduced by missionary priests. But, in Korea, it was started by a group of lay people.

In 1779, a young Korean man, Yi Seung-Hun, became interested in Catholicism through a friend. He began reading about the Catholic Church from some Chinese books that he was given. Several years later, he traveled to China and found a priest to baptize him.

Then Yi Seung-Hun along with several other lay people committed themselves to spreading Catholicism throughout Korea. At that time, there were no Catholic parishes and not even any priests. They simply went about sharing their faith with others, baptizing them, and worshiping with them in their houses. In fact, it wasn't until 10 years later, in 1794, that a priest was sent to the country.

Though there were no parishes and no priests, these committed lay people had great success bringing Christianity to their country, even though the government was against it. The first Korean to be ordained a priest - Saint Andrew Kim Tae-gon - was murdered barely one year into his priesthood. Nonetheless, the faith continued to spread throughout the country. When Catholicism was finally legalized in Korea, it was estimated that 10,000 Catholics had been put to death because of their faith.

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Today, Catholics make up 11% of the total population of South Korea. And it continues to grow rapidly. In 2017, there were 75,000 adult baptisms. And it all started because several lay people took seriously their baptismal vocation to live and spread the faith, even at the cost of their lives.

Today, we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled the apostles with the power to spread the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Because of their bold witness, 3000 were baptized on that first Pentecost. From there the Church has spread throughout the world to the point that 2 billion people on the planet today call themselves Christians with the vast majority of them being Catholics.

During these past 2000 years, the Church has gone through many ups and downs. Right now, in Europe and the Americas, we are going through some profound changes. In the past, it was enough for us to maintain our church buildings and provide the sacraments. We didn't have to go out searching for parishioners. They came to us when they needed to have their children baptized. Even if they stopped coming to church after their confirmation, they would eventually come back to be married.

But times are different. People are not necessarily coming to us anymore. It is not enough today for us simply to maintain the buildings and wait for people to show up. We have to start going out into the world to invite people.

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In the past, we relied on priests and sisters to do all the work. If something needed to be done, Father or Sister would take care of it. But, if our parishes are to grow and thrive, all of us have to take responsibility for them. That is what the first Catholics of Korea did. They didn't wait for a priest or sister to come and spread the faith. They took responsibility for it themselves, and the Holy Spirit did not let them down.

It is natural for us to want to hold on to the past. We have all had many special and beautiful experiences in these parishes. We want them to continue. But, if our parishes are to grow and thrive, we can't just sit around and wait for it to happen. We can't continue to do things the way they've always been done.

The apostles themselves had a lot of memories of the upper room. It was where they had the Last Supper and where Jesus appeared to them after the Resurrection. Where would we be if they said to themselves, "Let's just stay in this upper room and reminisce about the good old days with Jesus"? The Church would never have gotten off the ground. In the same way, we have to step out in faith and bring the good news of Jesus Christ into the streets.

We do that simply by sharing our story. All of us are here because Jesus has touched our lives in one way or another. All of us are here because the Catholic faith is important to us and has helped us grow in holiness. And so, we have to tell others about it. Even if we don't know a lot about our faith, we do know a lot about our own lives and our own experiences. No one can argue with us about what we've seen and heard. Sharing it with others might not convince them on the spot. But it will give

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the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work on them. And once the Holy Spirit gets to work, there is no telling what will happen.

One of the images of the Holy Spirit is fire. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends on the apostles in tongues of fire, in effect, making them living candles. Fire provides light and it also spreads rapidly. The same is true of the Holy Spirit. If we allow Him to work in and through us, the effects will be dramatic. All Jesus is asking us to do is to overcome our fears and tell our story.

Our world is hurting. Only faith in Jesus Christ can turn our society around. It is up to us to witness to people the joy and peace that comes from proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and by living that faith in the Church He established.

If this is going to happen - if the faith is going to spread so that it can heal our broken world - we cannot wait for the bishops, priests, deacons, or sisters to do it. All of us will have to do it, just as Yi Seung-hun did in Korea and just as so many dedicated lay people in the rest of Asia and Africa are doing today - simply by allowing the Holy Spirit to use us to touch everyone we come into contact with, passing on the flame of faith until the whole world is on fire with the love of God.