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Audience with pilgrims from Korea

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a group of pilgrims from Korea, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I welcome you, pleased to meet you on the day of the martyrdom of Saint Andrew Kim Taegon, 177 years ago, and on the occasion of the blessing of his statue, installed in one of the external niches of Saint Peter's Basilica. I thank the Lord for the witness of life and faith of your great saint, and also for yours, because the Korean people, when they follow Jesus Christ, give a beautiful witness. And special thanks go to all those who have dedicated themselves to the realization of this project, especially Cardinal Lazarus - he is good! -, Bishop Mathias Ri long-hoon, president of the Episcopal Conference, and the brother bishops of Korea. I also cordially greet the civil authorities present, the priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful: so many of you have come as pilgrims from Korea and other parts of the world! I express heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Joseph Han Jin-seop, his wife, and Professor Maria Ko Jong-hee, who sculpted the statue.

In August 2014, I had the joy of visiting your country to meet the young participants in the Sixth Asian Youth Day. On that occasion I went to the Solmoe Shrine, to the house where Saint Andrew Kim was born and spent his childhood. There I prayed in silence, especially for Korea and for young people. When I think of the intense life of this great saint, the words of Jesus come to my heart: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (*Jn 12:24*). These are words that help us to read with spiritual intelligence the beautiful story of your faith, of which Saint Andrew Kim is a precious seed: he, the first Korean martyr priest, was killed at a young age shortly after receiving ordination.

He invites us to discover the vocation entrusted to the Korean Church, to all of you: you are called to a young faith, to an ardent faith that, animated by love of God and neighbour, becomes a gift. In this sense, with the

prophecy of martyrdom, the Korean Church reminds us that one cannot follow Jesus without embracing his cross and that one cannot proclaim oneself a Christian without being willing to follow the way of love to the end.

I would like to say one more thing about Saint Andrew Kim: he had a great passion for spreading the Gospel. He dedicated himself to the proclamation of Jesus with nobility of spirit, without flinching in the face of dangers and despite many sufferings: suffice it to say that his grandfather and father were also martyred and his mother was forced to live as a beggar. Looking at him, how can we not feel exhorted to cultivate apostolic zeal in our hearts, to be a sign of a Church that goes out of itself to joyfully sow the seed of the Gospel, also through a life spent for others, in peace and love? And on this I would like to emphasize one thing: you have the grace of so many priestly vocations; please, "chase them away", send them to the missions, because if not, there will be more priests than people, and it this will not do: let them be missionaries elsewhere. I have the experience of having seen them in Argentina and your missionaries do so much good: send them away, let the priests be the ones needed, and may the others go away as missionaries.

Your Church, which rises up from the laity and is made fruitful by the blood of the martyrs, regenerates itself by drawing from its roots the generous evangelical impulse of the witnesses and the appreciation of the role and charisms of the laity. From this point of view, it is important to broaden the space of pastoral collaboration, to carry forward the proclamation of the Gospel together; priests, men and women religious, and all the laity: without divisions. The desire to give the world the hope of the Gospel opens the heart to enthusiasm, helps to overcome many barriers. The Gospel does not divide, but unites; it urges one to incarnate oneself and to make oneself close within one's own culture, within one's own history, with meekness and in a spirit of service, without ever creating conflicts, but always building communion. Building communion. Reflect well on this.

I would then like to invite you to rediscover your vocation as "apostles of peace" in every sphere of life. While Andrew Kim was studying theology in Macao, he had to witness the horrors of the Opium Wars; yet, in that conflictual context, he managed to be a seed of peace for many, proving his aspiration to meet everyone and dialogue with everyone. It is a prophecy for the Korean Peninsula and for the whole world: it is the stimulus to become companions on the road and witnesses of reconciliation; it is the credible testimony that the future is built not with the violent force of weapons, but with the gentle one of proximity. Let us entrust to Saint Andrew Kim the dream of peace of the Korean Peninsula, which is always in my thoughts and prayers.

As you know, I have announced that Seoul will be the venue for the next World Youth Day in 2027, in preparation for which I wish you to zealously devote yourselves to spreading the Word of God. In particular, I would like to entrust the Korean Church precisely to young people. Despite your marvellous history of faith and the great pastoral work that you carry out with enthusiasm, many young people, including your own, allow themselves to be seduced by the false myths of efficiency and consumerism, and fascinated by the illusion of hedonism. But the hearts of young people seek something else, they are made for much broader horizons: take care of them, seek them out, approach them, listen to them, proclaim to them the beauty of the Gospel so that, inwardly free, they may become joyful witnesses of truth and fraternity.

Dear brothers and sisters, I truly thank you for this meeting. I pray for you and invoke the intercession of Saint Andrew Kim and the Holy Korean Martyrs, that they may protect you and show you the way. I bless you from my heart, and please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
