



Foreign Martyrs in Korea

Blessed James Zhou Wenmo (복자 주문모 야고보)

The First Missionary Priest & Martyr in Korea



Blessed James Zhou Wenmo (1752 - 1801) is the first missionary priest to enter Korea during the Joseon Dynasty, which had a strict closed-door policy at the time. Born in Suzhou, China in 1752, he lost his parents early in life and were raised by his grandmother. He became a priest as one of the **first graduates at Beijing Archdiocese seminary.** At that time, Bishop Gouvea in Beijing was planning to send a clergy to Joseon. He chose Fr. Zhou, who had a strong faith and looked similar to Joseon people.

After leaving Beijing in February 1794, Fr. Zhou waited at Yodong area until the Amnok River froze enough to cross across. On the appointed date, he went to a town located on the border between China and Joseon to meet secret envoys sent from Joseon and **entered Joseon on the night of December 24.** Since then, Fr. Zhou stayed at the house of a faithful Christian so that he could learn Hangul, the Korean alphabets. **On Easter Sunday of 1795, he celebrated the first mass on Korean soil.**

After his entry was revealed, he escaped to female President Colomba Kang Wan-sook's house and continued to pray in many areas in secrecy. Despite having to remain in hiding, **Fr. Zhou oversaw significant growth in the Catholic community, which reportedly grew to about 10,000 members by 1800 after six years.**

After the death of the relatively tolerant King Jeongjo in 1800, a new period of intense persecution known as the Shin-yu Persecution began in 1801. **Facing threats to his followers, Fr. Zhou turned himself in to the authorities in hopes of ending the persecution.** He was beheaded on May 31, 1801, at Saenamteo in Seoul, **becoming the first priest to be martyred in Korea.** His sacrifice and the thousands of other martyrs during the persecution solidified the foundations of the Korean Catholic Church. **Fr. Zhou was beatified along with 123 Korean martyrs by Pope Francis in 2014.**

The Foreign Martyrs from Paris Foreign Missions Society

The **foreign martyrs in Korea** were primarily **missionaries from the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP)** who came to Korea in the late 18th and 19th centuries to serve the growing Catholic community. Because Korea had very few priests at the time, these missionaries risked arrest, torture, and execution to administer sacraments, teach catechism, and support the faithful.

They provided **sacraments, guidance, and education** when Korea had almost no native priests. They also helped **train catechists**, who then led local communities in the absence of clergy. Their martyrdom inspired the Korean faithful and strengthened the lay-led Church, which later produced native priests like **St. Andrew Kim Taegon**.



1864 departures of MEP missionaries. The four on the left would become martyrs in Korea.

10 French Missionary Martyrs in Korea canonized in 1984 as part of 103 Saint Martyrs

Name	Birth Date	Death Date
St. Laurent Imbert	1796	1839 Gi-hae Persecution
St. Jacques-Honoré Chastan	1803	
St. Pierre-Philibert Maubant	1803	
St. Antoine Daveluy	1793	1866 Byeong-in Persecution
St. Siméon-François Berneux	1814	
St. Pierre Henri Dorie	1839	
St. Pierre Aumaître	1830	
St. Louis Beaulieu	1840	
St. Just de Bretenières	1838	
St. Martin-Luc Huin	1830	

St. Laurent-Marie-Joseph Imbert



Saint Laurent Imbert (1796-1839) was born in southern France and raised in a devout Christian family. Resourceful from a young age, he funded his education by making rosaries and later joined the Paris Foreign Missions Society.

Ordained in 1819, he set sail for Asia the following year. In 1821, he briefly stopped in Singapore, when he wrote the first Catholic report on the fledgling mission – laying the foundation for the Church

there. Imbert ministered in Vietnam and then China for over a decade, enduring hardship and founding a seminary in Sichuan.

In 1837, he was secretly consecrated as a bishop and entered Korea during a wave of persecution. There, he ministered in hiding - preaching, hearing confessions, and forming future priests. Captured in 1839, Bishop Imbert wrote a letter urging two fellow priests to surrender with him: ***“The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”*** Imprisoned, tortured, and beheaded on September 21, 1839, at Saenamteo. Bishop Imbert was canonized in 1984 as one of the 103 Korean Martyrs.

St. Pierre-Philibert Maubant



Saint Pierre Maubant (1803-1839) was born in Normandy and ordained in 1829. He joined the Paris Foreign Missions Society and, after a brief mission in China, was **sent to Korea in 1839.**

As the **first French priest to enter Korea**, he ministered in secret and helped **baptize more than 2,000 catechumens in a single year.** He **also selected Andrew Kim Taegon and others as candidates for the priesthood.** His tireless and courageous work soon drew

attention, and he was arrested and executed by beheading on September 21, 1839 during Gihae Persecution in Seoul.

St. Jacques-Honoré Chastan



Saint Jacques-Honoré Chastan (1803-1839), was born in 1803 in the French Alps, the same year as Saint Pierre Maubant, and was ordained in 1826. He entered the missions in 1827 and, after serving in Thailand and Malaysia, reached **Korea in 1836 following a grueling journey.**

He ministered with humility and love for the faithful. ***"We are going to a too great celebration to allow***

sadness," he wrote before his arrest, expressing his joy in martyrdom. **When persecution escalated, Bishop Imbert surrendered himself to protect the laity and called on Maubant and Chastan to do the same. Trusting in God, they obeyed.** The three were tortured and beheaded on September 21, 1839, in Seoul. They were 36 years old. Canonized in 1984 as one of the 103 Korean Martyrs, they are remembered for their fearless love and priestly sacrifice.

Venerable Emil Joseph Kapaun



Venerable Emil Kapaun (1916-1951) was born in Pilsen, Kansas, United States and ordained a priest in 1940. **He was a Catholic priest martyr and a United States Army chaplain during World War II and the Korean War. He became known for his selflessness, courage, and deep commitment to caring for the physical and spiritual well-being of his troops.** Kapaun was a chaplain in the Burma Theater of World War II, then served again as a chaplain with the U.S. Army in Korea, providing spiritual and emotional support to American soldiers. He often celebrated Mass on the battlefield and led secret prayer services to strengthen morale.

During the Korean War, he was captured and **died in a prisoner-of-war camp on**

May 23, 1951. Fr. Emil Joseph Kapaun became a national hero for his extraordinary bravery and compassion as a U.S. Army chaplain during the Korean War. In 2013, he posthumously received the **Medal of Honor** for his actions in Korea. In 1993, Pope John Paul II declared him a **Servant of God**, the first stage on the path to canonization, and in 2025, Pope Francis declared him **Venerable**, the next stage on the path to canonization.

Bishop Patrick James Byrne



Bishop Patrick Bryne (1888-1950) was born in Washing D.C., United States. Ordained as a priest in 1915, he joined the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (Maryknoll).

He was assigned for missions in Korea and Japan, serving as

Prefect Apostolic of Pyongyang from 1927 to 1929, **Perfect Apostolic of Kyoto** (Japan) from 1937 to 1940, **Apostolic Visitor to Korea** from 1947 to 1949, and the first **Apostolic Delegate to Korea** from 1949 to 1950. **He was ordained bishop in 1949 at the age of 60** at the dawn of the Cold War, when Korea was dividing between the communist North, backed by China and the Soviet Union, and the South supported by the United States.

In July 1950, after the capture of Seoul by North Korean forces, **Bishop Byrne was arrested and put on trial. Though threatened with death, he refused to denounce** the United States, the United Nations, or the Vatican. **During a four-month forced march, he endured hard weather, starvation, and illness.** As pneumonia set in and he realized death was near, he remained steadfast in faith and died in custody in Korea. He declared:

“After the privilege of my priesthood, I regard this privilege of having suffered for Christ with all of you as the greatest of my life.”