

Martyrs honored as Vietnamese diocese celebrates 400 years

More than 20,300 Catholics killed during the 17th to 19th centuries Martyrs honored as Vietnamese diocese celebrates 400 years



Catholics from a central Vietnam diocese have celebrated their 400th jubilee year and remembered those martyrs who sacrificed their lives for spreading the faith.

About 10,000 Catholics attended the opening celebration on July 26 to mark the 400th anniversary of Catholicism being introduced in Qui Nhon Diocese.

Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, Vatican's non-resident representative to Vietnam, presided over the special Mass held in the compound of the old Lang Song Seminary in Tuy Phuoc District of Binh Dinh Province.

Also present at the event were Archbishop Joseph Nguyen Chi Linh of Hue, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, five other bishops and hundreds of priests.

In his homily, Bishop Mathews Nguyen Van Khoi of Qui Nhon said three Jesuit missionaries — Italian Fathers Francesco Buzomi and Cristoforo Borri, Portuguese Father Francisco de Pina and Portuguese Brother Antonio Dias — came to establish the first mission station in July 1618 at Nuoc Man which

now belongs to Qui Nhon Diocese. They came at the invitation of a local mandarin named Tran Duc Hoa.

From that mission station, the missionaries began introducing Catholicism to the area and neighboring places, Bishop Khoi said. The missionaries created Vietnamese Romanization or "quoc ngu" which is today the national language.

The anniversary event aimed to "commemorate the merits of our ancestors who sacrificed their own lives and poured blood and sweat for the evangelization work in the motherland of Qui Nhon," Bishop Khoi said.

The prelate also urged the congregation to "follow the examples of our ancestors to blossom the seeds of faith that they sowed."

Bishop Khoi said that persecution of Catholics followed the arrival of the missionaries.

More than 20,300 Catholics were killed by local authorities during the 17th to 19th centuries. Among them was Andrew Phu Yen (1625-1644), the first Vietnamese witness who died for the Catholic faith on July 26, 1644. He was beatified on March 5, 2000 by St. Pope John Paul II. The feast of Blessed Andrew Phu Yen, who is patron of catechists in Vietnam, is observed on July 26.

Three other martyrs — Francis Gagelin Kinh, Andrew Nguyen Kim Thong and Stephanus Cuenot The — were canonized by St. Pope John Paul II on June 19, 1988.

During the Mass, local Catholics offered incense in front of an ancestors' altar and watched cultural performances depicting hardships and sufferings of Catholics during the diocese's long history.

Qui Nhon Diocese today is the remains of Dang Trong (Cochinchine) Vicariate which was established in 1659. Three neighboring dioceses of Kon Tum, Nha Trang and Da Nang were separated from this diocese.

The diocese covers the three provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Quang Ngai. It has 72,733 Catholics in 60 parishes and subparishes. It is served by 124 priests and 280 nuns.

ucanews.com reporter, Qui Nhon City