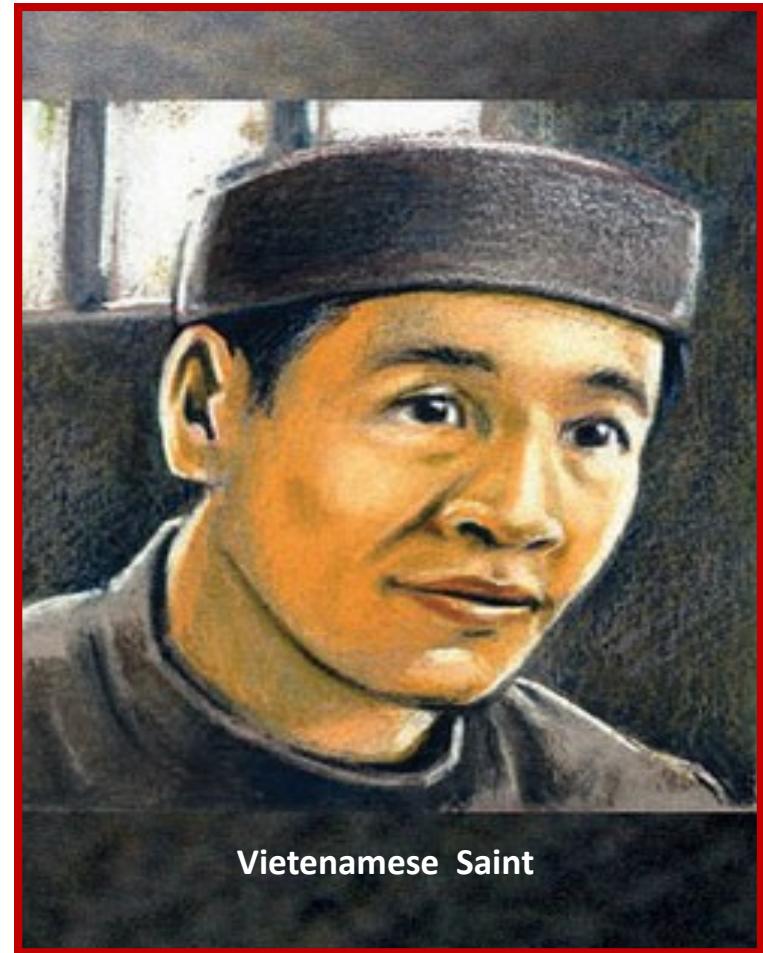




# Saint Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions

Feast Day: November 24



Vietnamese Saint

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WITNESSING TO CHRIST COMES WITH SUFFERING

## St. Andrew Dung-Lac and his 116 Companions, (d. 1745-1862)

\*These martyrs were mentioned by name in the Canonization Mass.

These 117 saints died under persecutions of Christians that in fact lasted from 1625 to 1886 and costed about 130.000 lives. The group consists of martyrs in the three Vietnamese kingdoms of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. Among the 117 were 96 Vietnamese and 21 foreign missionaries. Of the Vietnamese group were 37 priests and 59 lay people, among whom were catechists and tertiaries. One of them was a woman, mother of six. Of the missionaries was 11 Spaniards; 6 bishops and 5 priests, all Dominicans, and 10 were French; 2 bishops and 8 priests from *Société des Missions Etrangères* in Paris. 76 were beheaded, 21 suffocated, 6 burnt alive, 5 mutilated and 9 died in prison as a result of torture. A detailed description of their sufferings is found in a letter written by Paul Le Bao Tinh to the seminary of Ke Vinh in 1843. Further beatifications are expected.

The traditional Vietnamese religion is Buddhism, together with elements of Taoism, Confucianism and local ancestors' cult. The Catholic Church came with missionaries at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was seen as a foreign element and subject for fanatical persecution. During the first 200 years of Christianity in these parts it is believed that about 100.000 were martyred, but of most of these all historical record has been lost. The two first apostolic vicariates were established in 1659.

The earliest martyrs of whom there is substantial documentation are the Spanish Dominicans *Francisco Gil de Federich* and *Alonzo Lenziana*, who came to the country about 1580. Gil directed during nine years in prison a fruitful apostolate, while Lenziana, a fugitive for thirteen years, ministered faithfully but furtively to the native Christians. In 1773 two more Dominicans were beheaded, *Hyacint Casteneda*, a Spaniard who had evangelized in the Philippines and China for several years before being deported to Vietnam, where he was imprisoned for three years. There he was joined by *Vincent Liêm*, the first Indo-Chinese Dominican to be martyred, who had ministered to his countrymen for fourteen years before he was beheaded. In 1798 the first Vietnamese diocesan priests, *John Dat* and *Emmanuel Triêu*, also suffered martyrdom.



Saint Andrew Dung-Lac and his 116 Companions

Others who were mentioned by name in the canonisation mass were \**Thomas Tran Van Tien*, a seminarian, \**Emmanuel Le Van Phoung*, father of a family, the Dominican bishops \**Jerome Hermosilla* and \**Valentin Berrio Ochoa*.

In June 1862 a treaty between France and Amman guaranteed religious freedom. This marked the beginning of the end of the persecutions, some of whose features recall the sufferings of the martyrs in the early ages of Christianity.

The 117 martyrs were beatified in four groups, the first of them on 27 May 1900 (Pope Leo XIII), the second (all Dominicans) on 20 May 1906, a third on 2 May 1909 (both by Pope Pius X) and the last (including two Spanish bishops) on 29 April 1951 (Pope Pius XII). They were canonised in Rome on 19 June 1988 by Pope John Paul II.

At the canonization in Rome was no delegation from the communist regime in Vietnam. But 8000 Vietnamese in exile participated as representatives for their catholic countrymen in Vietnam, who not were allowed to leave the country. In addition came pilgrims especially from Spain, France and the Philippines, who have missioned in Vietnam for 300 years.

On 24 November 1960 Pope John XXIII established the catholic hierarchy in Vietnam. It included (1989) 1 cardinal, 35 bishops and 25 dioceses with about 6 millions Catholics, i.e. about 10 % of the population. These are the fruits from the martyrs' blood.

The group is also called Martyrs of Vietnam, of Indo-China or of Tonkin. Feasts: Formerly 2 February (the 1909 group), 11 July and 6 November. Now together on 24 November.

\*(excerpted from: katolsk.no)

During the first twenty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Christianity made steady progress, but this was dramatically interrupted by the persecutions under the Annamite emperors Minh-Mang (1820-40) and Tu Dúc (1847-83). From 1832 Minh-Mang excluded all foreign missionaries and ordered Vietnamese Christians to renounce Christianity by trampling on the crucifix. meanwhile churches were to be destroyed and teaching Christianity forbidden. Very many suffered death or extreme hardship.

Bishops, hardly 30 years old, got a piece of bamboo as pastoral staff and mitre of paper; older priests were exposed in cages for public mocking, which led to conversations until the end, and poor peasant were murdered because they refused to trample on an image of Christ. The persecutions are compared with those of ancient Roman emperors.

The Spanish Dominican bishops *Ignatius Delgado* and *Dominic Henarez*, each of whom had worked for 50 years there, were again arrested. Delgado (76) died of hunger, thirst, and exposure in a cage before he could be beheaded. Henarez and his Annamite catechist *Francis Chiêu* were both executed. Other Vietnamese priests who were martyred included *Peter Tuân*, *Bernard Duê* and *James Nam*. A doctor, *Joseph Canh*, and a tailor, *Thomas Dê*, suffered the same fate.

Some of the victims seem to have been induced by drugs to make temporary retractions: others endured fearsome tortures, including cutting off the limbs joint by joint. A group of French missionaries, including *Joseph Marchand* and *Jean-Charles Cornay*, also suffered: the former, who was captured at Saigon, died like St. Bartholomew while the flesh was torn from his body with red-hot tongs; the latter who was set up by weapons being buried in the plot of land he was cultivated, was imprisoned in a series of cages: being young and endowed with a fine voice, was obliged to sing to his captors. Eventually on 20 September 1837 the sentence of the supreme tribunal «that he is to be hewn in pieces and that his head, after being exposed for three days, is to be thrown into the river» was accomplished.

A Vietnamese diocesan priest who suffered martyrdom in this persecution is \*Andrew Dung-Lac, who is honoured by being the representative of the 117 martyrs in the Roman Calendar. His name was originally Dung An Trân, and he was born about 1795 in a poor and pagan family in Bac-Ninh in North Vietnam. When he was twelve the family had to move to Hà-Nôi (Hanoi) where his parents could find work. There he met a catechist and got food and shelter from him. He also got education in Christian faith for three years, and was baptized in Vinh-Tri with the Christian name Andrew (Andrew Dung). After learning Chinese and Latin he became a catechist, and thereafter taught catechises in the country. He was chosen to study theology, and on 15 March 1823 he was ordained priest. As parish priest in Ke-Dâm he was tireless in his preaching. He often fasted and lived a simple and moral life, he was a good example for the people, and many were baptized. In 1835 he was imprisoned under emperor Minh-Mang's persecutions (he was called Vietnam's emperor Nero), but his freedom was purchased by donations from members of the congregation he served. To avoid persecutions he changed his name to Lac (Andrew Lac) and moved to another prefecture to continue his work. But on 10 November 1839 he was again arrested, this time with Peter Thi, another Vietnamese priest whom he was visiting so that he might go to confession.

Once again Andrew was liberated, along with Peter Thi, in exchange for money. Their freedom was brief. They were soon re-arrested and taken to Hanoi, where both suffered a dreadful torture. Finally they both were beheaded 21 December 1839. Andrew was beatified in the first group on 27 May 1900.

Persecutions were revived in 1847 when Christians were suspected of complicity in rebellion, while French and Spanish efforts to protect their nationals caused a xenophobic and anti-Christian ferocity. Once more foreign missionaries and native clergy and laity suffered death for Christianity. The most famous include \*Théophane Venard of the Paris Mission. He was a schoolmaster's son, born at Saint-Loup-sur-Thouet (Deux-Sèvres) in 1829, he joined the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris as a young man, transferring to it from the seminary of Poitiers diocese. In 1852 he was ordained priest and in 1854 he was sent to Tonkin in a time of severe persecutions. Expelled from Nam-Dinh in 1856, he went to Hanoi, where however the renewed persecutions obliged him to hide in caves and sampans. At last he was arrested, placed in a bamboo cage, and ultimately in 1861 beheaded for the Christian faith. His letters and his example inspired the young St. Theresa of Lisieux to volunteer for the Carmelite nunnery at Hanoi. But she got tuberculosis and could not go. In 1865 Vénard's body was translated to his Congregation's church in Paris, but his head remains in Vietnam. With 19 other martyrs from this area he was beatified in 1909.

Others to suffer in the same persecution were Augustus Schöffler from Lorraine, and John Louis Bonnard, who wrote a fine letter of farewell to his family before being executed on 1 May 1852. Also should be mentioned Stephen Cuénot, a bishop who had established three vicariates during 25 years' episcopate, was hidden by a pagan during persecution until he had to emerge for water, and died of dysentery just before the edict for his execution arrived.

Christians were marked on their faces with the words **ta dao** (=false religion); husbands were separated from their wives, and children from their parents. Christian villages were destroyed and their possessions distributed. Among those who suffered death in this persecution were Laurence Huong, Paul Lôc and John Hoan (priests), Andrew Nam-Thuông (catechist), Michael Hy-Dinh-Hô (official) and Agnes Thành Thi Lê, mother of 6 children, who carried letters from the confessors in prison.

In the persecutions under emperor Tu-Dúc (1857-62) two more Spanish bishops were killed and a Vietnamese judge, Dominic Kham, as well as two fishermen, Peter Thuan and Dominic Toái, who along with Peter Da were burnt alive in a bamboo hut.