

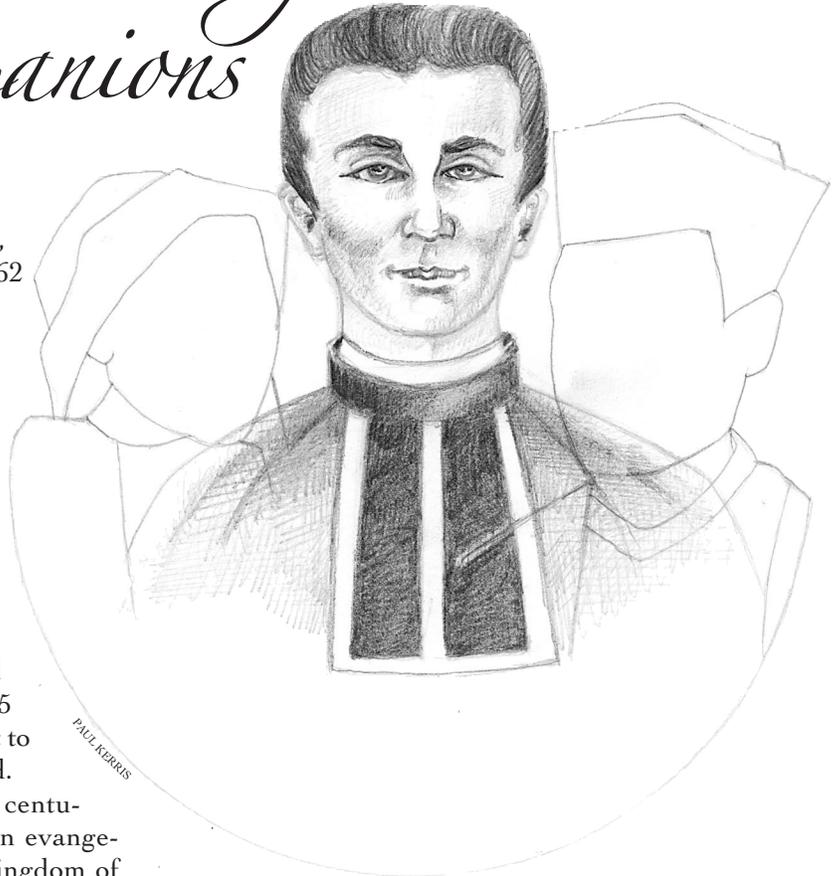
St. Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions

BORN 1795; DIED 1839 (ST. ANDREW),
AND OTHERS DIED 1745 THROUGH 1862
MARTYRS
FEAST DAY: NOVEMBER 24

THE CHURCH IN VIETNAM has suffered persecution ever since Christianity came to that country through the Portuguese early in the seventeenth century. Among the then-three Vietnamese kingdoms of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China, about one hundred thirty thousand Catholics are believed to have been martyred between 1625 and 1886, but records no longer exist to allow most of them to be documented.

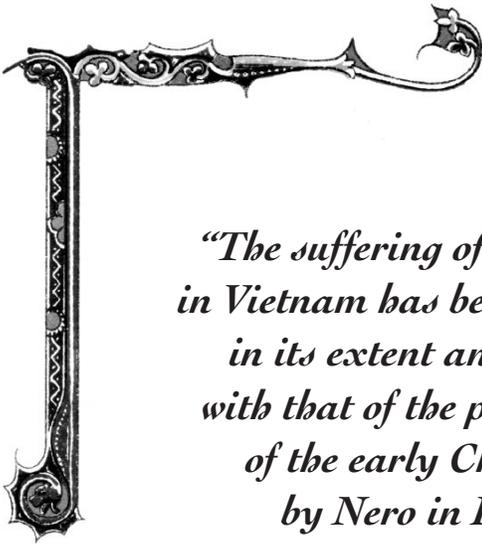
Nevertheless, by the nineteenth century much progress had been made in evangelizing Vietnam. However, in the kingdom of Annam emperors again initiated severe persecutions between 1820 and 1840, and between 1847 and 1883. Churches and Christian villages were destroyed, families were separated, the teaching of the faith was prohibited, Christians were branded on their faces with the Vietnamese words for “false faith,” and Catholics were ordered to trample on the chief symbol of their faith, the crucifix.

The group of one hundred seventeen martyrs celebrated on this feast day includes eight bishops, fifty priests, nine Dominican tertiaries (lay people who follow the Dominican rule while living in the world), and seventeen catechists martyred between 1745 and 1862. Most, ninety-six, were Vietnamese; eleven were Spanish and ten were French missionaries. Among those mentioned by name when they were canonized as a group were St. Andrew Dung-Lac, a dioc-



san priest; St. John-Théophane Venard, also a priest; St. Thomas Tran-Van-Thien, a seminarian; St. Emmanuel Le-Van-Pung, a layman and father; St. Jerome Hermosilla, a bishop; and St. Valentine Berrio-Ochoa, also a bishop. For some, their sufferings were horrific, including exposure in cages without food or drink, to general mockery; cutting their arms and legs off, a joint at a time; flaying with red-hot tongs; and being burned alive. A mother of six and a child of nine were among those martyred.

God's grace worked powerfully in the life of St. Andrew Dung-Lac, who heads the list of these courageous martyrs. Born Dung An Trân of pagan, poverty-stricken parents in Bac Ninh, a town in the kingdom of Tonkin (modern northern Vietnam) east of Hanoi, he was twelve when his parents moved to Hanoi to find work. A Catholic lay catechist offered him shelter, food,



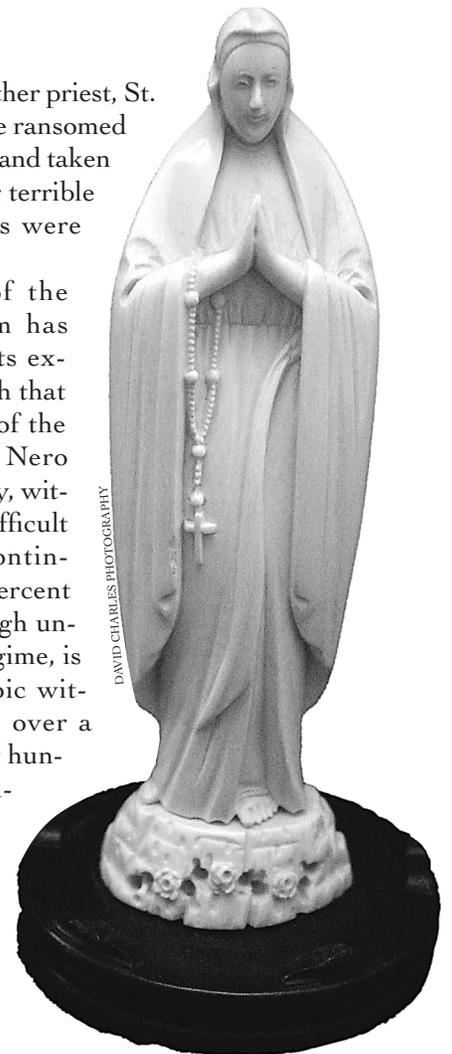
“The suffering of the Church in Vietnam has been compared in its extent and ferocity with that of the persecutions of the early Christians by Nero in Rome.”

and instruction, and his parents decided that this was the only way he would be educated. After three years of religious instruction, he was baptized and received the name Andrew. He learned Chinese and Latin, and worked as a catechist for ten years. In 1823, at the age of twenty-eight, he was ordained to the priesthood.

As a priest, Andrew lived a life of total commitment to those in his care. He became known for his love of the poor and the sick and for his preaching. Besides observing a vigorous Lenten daily fast, he fasted every Wednesday and Friday. He was imprisoned in 1835, ransomed by his congregation, and went elsewhere to continue his ministry, changing his name to Andrew Lac to avoid identification. He was again arrest-

ed, in 1839, with another priest, St. Peter Thi. They were ransomed but soon re-arrested, and taken to Hanoi. Following terrible torture, both priests were beheaded.

The suffering of the Church in Vietnam has been compared in its extent and ferocity with that of the persecutions of the early Christians by Nero in Rome. Even today, witness to the faith is difficult and persecution continues, but about ten percent of the nation, although under a Communist regime, is Catholic. The heroic witness of this nation, over a period of nearly four hundred years, is a shining example to the world of the depth of their faith and the strength given them by God.



Oriental statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary

