

SR. LUCIA PARK (NÉE: ANGELA)

Date of Birth: October 14, 1919

Birth Place: Sunan, South Pyongan Province, North Korea

Date of First Profession: June 22, 1943 in Wonsan, North Korea

Date of Death: October 11, 1950 in Sunan, South Pyongan Province, North Korea

Angela Park was the oldest of three children. She was born to a happy and prosperous Catholic family in the village of Sunan in North Korea on October 14, 1919. Her father died while Angela was still small.

From early childhood, Angela developed a strong, active faith. She learned to help the poor and suffering with deep compassion. She grew up as a strong personality with clear convictions. Taller than average in stature, she impressed people at first sight by her fine appearance. The villagers of Sunan knew her as one who always spoke the truth. They admired her beauty, wisdom and sound judgment.

When her aunt, our Sister Columba Park, received the monastic habit at Wonsan, Angela attended the ceremony and was deeply impressed. She felt inspired to enter the convent at once.

While she was a candidate, Angela passed a test to become a music teacher. She was a smart and very active young woman, strong in enduring difficulties. As a novice, Sister Lucia had to wait longer before being admitted to profession. She was sad at first. Then Sister Columba told her, "It does not matter who makes profession sooner, but who gets to wear the greater crown of martyrdom. You must endure and wait with patience." Sister Lucia made her monastic profession on June 22, 1943. Just seven years later, she did receive the crown of martyrdom.

All during World War II, from 1939 to 1945, the sisters of Wonsan Priory were virtually isolated from the rest of the congregation of Missionary Benedictine Sisters. In 1945 the Russians entered North Korea. They limited the freedom of the missionaries but did not mistreat them. However, in secret the Russians prepared the way for the Korean Communists to take power at New Years 1949. Then the persecution began.

On the night of May 10, 1949, Communist officials appeared at the priory house in Wonsan and confiscated it. The European sisters were imprisoned for several months at Pyongyang, the capital city of North Korea. Then they were taken to the mountains in the north. At the labor camp of Oksadok, they suffered until their release in 1954.

The nineteen Korean sisters were imprisoned at a "rehabilitation center" in Wonsan. They were denounced as lazy, useless citizens and were pressured to get married. A week later they were taken back to the convent to put on lay clothing and had to return to their families. The sisters said to themselves, "It is neither the convent building nor the habit that make the religious, but the heart and the spirit." All had resolved to remain faithful and to live their vocation as Missionary Benedictines whole-heartedly.

Sister Lucia and Sister Oliva, also a relative of Sister Columba Park, moved from Wonsan to Pyongyang, then to their home village of Sunan. Sister Lucia taught the children catechism three times a week, fearlessly gathering them in the very meeting hall of the Communists. The children also learned to sing the church songs.

Some of Sister Lucia's relatives were Communists. Naturally, they weren't very happy with her activities. Yet until the start of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, Sister Lucia had no difficulty in living up to her Missionary Benedictine vocation.

Sister Columba Park had been chosen as subprioress of Wonsan by Mother Prioress Gertrud Link in

1948. When all the sisters were imprisoned in 1949, Sister Columba was put in charge of the Korean sisters. This was a heavy responsibility for her. In February 1950, she took a chance and fled to South Korea. She asked Sisters Lucia and Oliva to follow her at the next opportunity, fearing that once her escape became known, the two other sisters would have problems.

Sister Oliva was hard of hearing. Sister Lucia thought there would be great danger if during an attempted flight they were arrested and separated. If interrogated, Sister Oliva might give answers that would ruin the chances for the other sisters to escape to the south. So the two sisters stayed in North Korea while most of the other Korean sisters succeeded in fleeing south.

The village of Sunan had been peaceful. One of Sister Lucia's third cousins, once a hired man of her family, had become a high-ranking Communist official. He reported Sister Lucia to the authorities. On September 24, 1950, she was arrested.

It is not certain why only Sister Lucia was imprisoned and not Sister Oliva. Perhaps Sister Lucia's exceptional beauty had attracted notice. Also her strong sense of justice had made her aware of injustices of the government against the people, and she told her Communist relatives that they needed to convert and repent. She had continued teaching religion and singing. Witnesses agree that all these factors contributed to her arrest.

In the fall of 1950 the South Korean army pushed north. As it came near Sunan, the Communist army marched all its prisoners to a mountain. There they shot them. Various dates have been given, October 5, 11, or 12. Sister Lucia Pak was among the prisoners who were executed by the Communists at that time.

Sister Lucia remained loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ and kept her lofty religious spirit. She fulfilled the will of God, faithful to the point of giving her very life at the age of 31 years.

1 Sr. Matilda Handl, "A Martyr's Crown for Missionary Courage: Sr. Luzia Pak (1919-1950