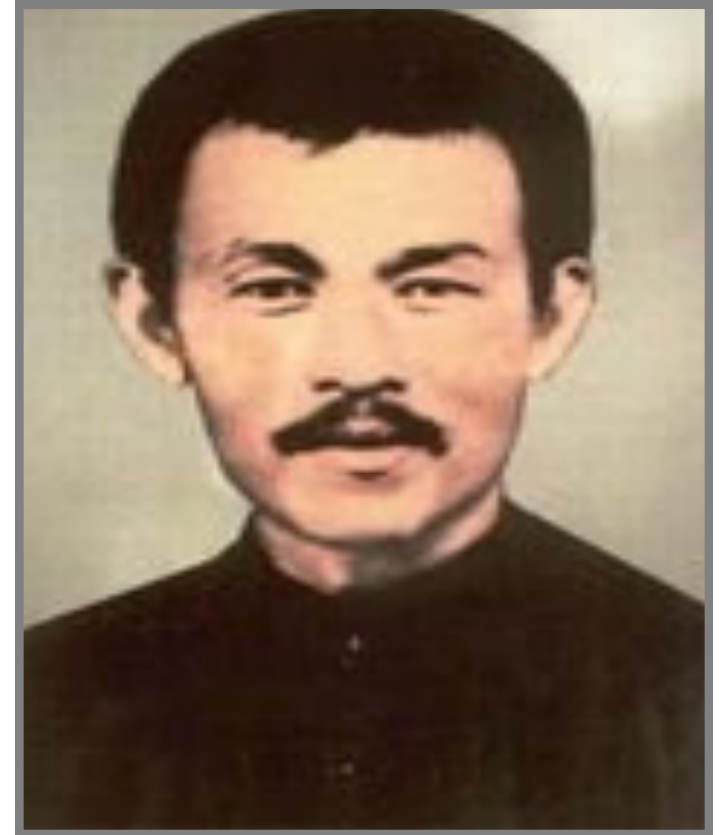


ON JANUARY 12, 1941, FATHER NICOLAS WAS ARRESTED FOR BEING A SPY WHILE PERFORMING RELIGIOUS DUTIES. HE WAS SENTENCED TO FIFTEEN YEARS IN PRISON.

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BLESSED NICOLAS BUNKERD KITBAMRUNG OF THAILAND

MEMORIAL — JANUARY 12TH



**WHILE IN PRISON FATHER NICOLAS HEARD CONFESSIONS
AND ADMINISTERED THE SACRAMENT OF
BAPTISM TO APPROXIMATELY 68 PEOPLE.**

Blessed Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung of Thailand

The country of Thailand is predominantly Buddhist (98%) but there have been Roman Catholics in the Kingdom ever since the arrival of the Portuguese and French in the 16th century.. The first Thai saints were five martyrs; nuns and lay people, who were murdered by a Thai policeman in Northeast Thailand. More recently a priest, Father Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung was proclaimed Blessed by Pope John Paul II in the year 2000.

Family Life

Bunkerd Kitbamrung was born to a Catholic family in Nakon Pathom province January 11, 1895. His baptism was on Feb 5, 1895 and he was given the baptismal name, Nicolas. He grew up in a small village where he attended a Catholic School. His parish church was St. Peter's in Sam Phran.

The Priesthood

Nicolas' childhood was unremarkable but he felt called to be a priest when he was still young. After training at the seminary in Penang, Malaysia (at that time there was no seminary to train priests in Thailand), he was ordained a priest on January 24, 1926 at Assumption Cathedral, Bangkok.

He first served in several parishes in North and Northeast Thailand, including Chiangmai, Lampang and Khorat. Later he assisted the Salesian Order of priests from Italy when they first arrived in 1927 helping to teach them Thai and also training seminarians in catechesis. Catholics were considered 'unpatriotic' as it was considered 'to be a Thai is to be a Buddhist'. Also, at that time, disputes with France over borders with Laos caused Thai authorities to look with suspicion on those associated with the French. Since many of the Catholic priests in Thailand at that time were French, this caused obvious problems.

Arrest and Imprisonment

On January 12, 1941, Father Nicolas was arrested for being a spy while performing religious duties. By then Thailand was fighting on the side of Japan in World War II, somewhat of a necessity since Japan had invaded the country using the route through Thailand to the British colonies of Malaya and Singapore.

Father Nicolas was sentenced to fifteen years in prison at Bang Khwang prison. While in prison he contracted tuberculosis and died on January 12, 1944 at the age of 49. It was rumored that he was denied care because he was a Catholic but there is no proof of this. While in prison he had heard confessions and administered the sacrament of

baptism to approximately 68 persons.

Father Nicolas had a great concern for pastoral work and compassion for the poor during his lifetime.

Beatification

After a thorough examination of his life by the Church, Pope John Paul II proclaimed Fr. Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung 'blessed' on January 27, 2000 and the ceremony of beatification was held on March 5, 2000 at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. This is the first step before being canonized as a 'saint'.

Thai Catholics from all parts of Thailand came to joyfully celebrate the beatification in Father Nicolas' home town of Sam Phran, Nakhon Pratom later in that same year.

Source

Blessed Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung. Leaflet published by the Archdiocese of Bangkok: 2000



The Last Supper at St Nikolaus Church in Pattaya, Thailand