



TESTIMONY TO LOVE: THE 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GENNA GREAT MARTYRDOM (2022-3)

September 10, 2022, the feast of the 205 Blessed Martyrs of Japan, will mark the 400th anniversary of the Genna era Great Martyrdom of Nagasaki and next year December 4 will be the 400th anniversary of the Genna era Great Martyrdom of Edo.

The Committee for Promoting Canonization will commemorate these 15 months as the **Testimony to Love: The 400th Anniversary of the Genna Great Martyrdom**. (The Committee for Promoting Canonization of CBCJ wishes to commemorate the 15 months from the day of Genna great Martyrdom of Nagasaki to that of Edo as ‘a year of Testimony to God's love’.) It will be an opportunity to learn the spirituality of the martyrs that is a common heritage of the Church in Japan, to pray together, to increase our momentum to emulate the lives of the martyrs, and to draw from them strength for evangelization.

The period 2022-3 marks several milestones in the evangelization of Japan:

- The 400th anniversary of the Canonization of St. Francis Xavier (March 12, 2022).
- The 160th anniversary of the Canonization of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan (June 8, 2022).
- The 400th anniversary of the founding of the Dicastery for the Evangelization of Peoples (June 22, 2022).¹
- The 400th anniversary of the Great Martyrdom in Nagasaki (September 10, 2022).
- The 150th anniversary the removing of notice boards banning Christianity (February 24, 2023).²
The 150th anniversary of the return of Christians exiled in The fourth persecution of Urakami.
- The 400th Anniversary of the Great Martyrdom of Edo (December 4, 2023).

Pope St. John Paul II said in a sermon at a Mass in Nagasaki on February 26, 1981, that the foundation of the Church in Japan was laid on the blood of the martyrs.³

¹ On June 22, 1622, the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide was founded. Its purpose was the spread of faith and the unity of the whole world's churches. In particular, it developed a wide range of activities in newly discovered areas. Since August 15, 1967, it is called the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Congregatio pro Evangelizatione Populorum).

² The Fourth Persecution of Urakami Christians in 1867 (Keio 3) led to the Meiji government issuing decree No. 68 on February 24, 1873, (Meiji 6) that ended the approximately 260-year-old prohibition of Christianity.

³ Pope St. John Paul II, Sermon at the Matsuyama Stadium in Nagasaki, February 26, 1981.

Pope Francis in his message to Japan's bishops during his visit in 2019 said, "I think of the martyrs Saint Paul Miki and his companions ... who in the midst of many trials bore witness up to his death. ... We can also think of those 'hidden Christians' of the Nagasaki region, who kept the faith for generations. ... The DNA of your communities is marked by this witness, an antidote against despair, that points out the path they must follow. ... Faithful sowing, the witness of martyrs and patient expectation of the fruits that the Lord gives in his time, have characterized your apostolic approach to Japanese culture."⁴ It is time for the Church in Japan to listen to the martyrs and bring to life in the Church today the special blessing of salvation that God has given to the Church in Japan.

So long as we put our trust in God we need not fear any calamity. On the contrary, times of crisis are good opportunities to meet God's grace (Divine Grace).⁵ When they were suffering great persecution the Christians of the Age of Persecution were not holed up and scarcely breathing. Even as officials searched, the Christians cared for the sick, helped widows and orphans, and reached out to the poor. "God consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

What is required of the Church today is unity and solidarity backed by prayer full of trust. That will be a very effective means of overcoming division and intolerance. The Church in Japan must pray earnestly with one heart, a heart of solidarity. Let us be united in prayer and turn our overcoming the corona disaster into a sign of hope. And let us look to the martyrs who testified to their love in the midst of hardship and find a new ray of hope for the next 50 years.

Committee for Promoting Canonization
Chairman: Paul Yoshinao Otsuka, Bishop of Kyoto
February 18, 2022

⁴ Pope Francis, "Official Records of Pope Francis' Visit to Japan" p.23. (Talk to the Bishops of Japan at the Apostolic Nunciature, November 23, 2019, published June 10, 2021, by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan).

⁵ Romans 8:35, 5:3-4, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 4:17.