

In 1858, Japan again permitted Christianity in Japan. Missionaries found thousands of Christians still in Japan. For two hundred years they had carried on the faith in secret.

If Paul Miki had lived, he would have been the very first Japanese priest for he had already completed his studies for the priesthood. From his cross he told the people to ask Christ to show them how to be truly happy. Their feast day is celebrated on February 6 in Ordinary time.

*(excerpted from: www.catholic.org; www.loyolapress.com)

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Saint Paul Miki

Feast Day: February 6



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*Paul Miki was born into a wealthy Japanese family at Tounucumada, Japan. He was the son of a Japanese military leader. Educated by the Jesuits in Azuchi and Takatsuki, Japan, he joined the Society of Jesus in 1580 and became a well-known and successful preacher – gaining numerous converts to Catholicism.

When the first missionaries, like St. Francis Xavier, came to Japan in 1549 they were warmly welcomed. Many Japanese became Christians. When the leader of the Japanese dynasty Toyotomi Hideyoshi took command of the government, he became fearful of the influence of the Jesuits and of their intentions. Toyotomi suspected that Christians wanted to take over the government, so began persecuting Catholics. In 1587 Hideyoshi banished the Christians and destroyed many of the churches. Some missionary priests stayed and went into hiding, dressing like Japanese citizens in order to minister to the Christians living in Japan.

More than three thousand Christians were martyred in Japan during this period. On December 8, 1596 Hideyoshi arrested and condemned to death the Friars of Miako. Among them were three Japanese Jesuits, six Franciscans (four of them Spanish), and seventeen Japanese laymen. Charged with attempting to harm the government, they were sentenced to crucifixion. Some of these men were very young: Louis was 10; Anthony, 13; Thomas, 16; and Gabriel, 19, the son of the Franciscan's porter.

Miki and his companions were jailed and were forced to march six-hundred miles from Kyoto to Nagasaki. The journey was made through snow and ice and freezing streams. Along the way they preached to the people who had come out to see them. They sang psalms of praise and joy including the Te Deum. They prayed the rosary and told the people that such a martyrdom was an occasion of rejoicing, not of sadness.

Finally, on February 5, they reached Nagasaki, where twenty-six crosses awaited them on a hill now called the Holy Mountain. It is said that the Christians ran to their crosses, singing. Soldiers bound them to the crosses with iron bands at their wrists, ankles, and throats. Then they thrust them through with lances. Many people came to watch the cruel deaths. Hideyoshi and his soldiers had hoped the example would frighten other Christians. Instead, it gave them the courage to profess their faith as the martyrs had. Miki preached his last sermon from the cross, and it is maintained that he forgave his executioners, stating that he himself was Japanese. Crucified alongside him were Joan (de Goto) and Santiago Kisai, also of the Society of Jesus; along with twenty-three other clergy and laity, all of whom were canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1862.