

While Nagasaki may be infamous in contemporary minds for what happened on August 9, 1945; Nagasaki in the 1600s was the site of the execution of the martyrs of Japan - missionaries, and locals ... Jesuits, and Franciscans ... Portuguese, and Japanese ... adults, and children.

They were crucified, beheaded, and burned alive ... for refusing to deny their faith.

At the beginning of the evangelization of Japan, 50 years before; that nation was a collection of city-states. When the missionaries would run into trouble in one fiefdom, they could easily relocate to another area and continue their efforts at evangelization. When the push to unite Japan politically under the Shogunate commenced, the state religion became a matter of political whim, and military enforcement.

Supposedly in a drunken rage, after being told that the Spanish were intent on conquering Japan through the influence of their missionaries; the second Shogun, Tokugawa Hidetada, issued the following edict in 1614:

*The Kirishitan (キリシタン) band happened to reach Japan. Not only have they sent merchant vessels to exchange commodities, but they also spread a pernicious doctrine to confuse the right ones, so that they would change the government of the country and own the country. This will become a great catastrophe. We cannot but stop it.*

And that began the great martyrdom of Christians in Japan.

Brother Paul Miki, a Japanese Jesuit, was martyred with 25 companions in Nagasaki. They were crucified, and then thrust through with lances. From his cross, Miki declared:

*The only reason for my being killed is that I have taught the doctrine of Christ. I thank God it is for this reason that I die. I believe that I am telling the truth before I die.*

*After Christ's example, I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as a fruitful rain.*

The place of their execution is known to this day as the *Martyr's Hill*.

In today's readings, first we hear King David's deathbed admonition to his son Solomon, where he tells him to:

*[follow] [God's] ways and [observe] his statutes, commands, ordinances, and decrees*

As well as David's first admonition to Solomon to: "*Take courage and be a man.*"

And in the Gospel we hear one of the first missionary excursions by the disciples from the Gospel of Mark.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, may we take to heart the actions of our Lord's first disciples, as well as the holy Martyrs of Japan - and "*take courage*" in going forth to proclaim the Gospel in our own homes and neighborhoods ... through the way we live our lives ... and through our own words and actions.