

FOUR JESUITS OF JAPANESE PROVINCE TO BE BEATIFIED

Fuyuki Hirabayashi, S.J. (2008)

*From Francis Britto's All About Francis Xavier at
<http://pweb.cc.sophia.ac.jp/britto/xavier>*

In the S.J. Calendar which the Japanese Province publishes each year, we are informed about the birthday of each member of the province, and of the feastday of the saint after whom he has been named, as well as the day on which deceased members have gone to meet their Savior. In this way, we are able to make a memento of our brother in our Masses and prayers of those days. Unfortunately, however, no such notation is made for our predecessors of the Christian age, even for those who devoted themselves so completely to their mission of evangelization that they shed their blood and became martyrs.

The first Jesuit we find in our historical records to be referred to as superior of all of Japan is Father Coelho. He is first called "Vice-Provincial" in 1581, and then from 1611 the superior of the Jesuits in Japan is called "Provincial." From this, we are able to conclude that the Province of Japan can trace its origins to a time that precedes the proscription of Christianity under the Tokugawa *bakufu*, and goes back well into the 16th century. It is important for us to be aware of the fact that, almost from the beginning of the Japanese mission, the Jesuits of our province carried out their missionary activity while being exposed to the great suffering resulting from almost continued persecution. Among our forefathers are many men of extraordinary devotion and valor whom we should greatly treasure. As we attempt now to discover the path that our Province ought to take into the future, it is not enough to reflect upon the path we have taken in the 100 years since the Society of Jesus returned to Japan in modern times. The future will not come into our vision, unless we also take firm possession of the inheritance left to us by our forbears, a kind of spiritual DNA for the Society of Jesus in Japan. We must reflect upon their way of life and try to come to a good understanding of the Japan Province as it was in that age.

When looked at in this context, the fact that in the very year in which we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Jesuit return to Japan, we also celebrate the beatification of four of our Japanese brethren of Japan's Christian century would seem to be highly significant, truly a special grace given to us by God, a grace that leads us to the keen realization that our Japan Province, like the Church in Japan itself, has its origins in the blood of martyrs. "*Sanguis martyrorum, semen Christianorum.*" (Tertullian) The Japan Province of the Society of Jesus, overcoming a host of sufferings and difficulties, helped to lay the foundation for the Church of Christ in Japan and to nurture its growth. We should be aware of this fact and take as great pride in it as we do in the fact that it was St. Francis Xavier's dream to establish in Japan centers of higher learning.

The four Jesuits included in the list of 188 martyrs to be beatified are Peter Kibe, Julian Nakaura, Diego Yuki Ryosetsu, and Nicholas Fukunaga Keian. Although they were of differing characters, and labored in different areas, places, and times, they all had one thing in common: in each one of them beat strongly the heart of a son of St. Ignatius, the heart of a shepherd prepared to give up even his life in tending the flock Our Lord had

entrusted to him. With extraordinary single-mindedness and courage they devoted their lives completely to serving God and fellow man, always according to the spirit of *magis*, which gave them a special power.

(1) PETER KIBE---THE PRIEST WHO WOULD NOT GIVE IN

Those who seek the Lord and make it their aim to help others secure their salvation are always on the march, and always ahead of them on the path guiding them is the light that is God himself. Peter Kibe is one of those who lived out this conviction to the very end of his life.



Peter Kibe was born in 1587, the son of Romano Kibe, a retainer of the Otomo clan, and was baptized soon after birth in a church in the castle town of Nakatsu in what is now Oita Prefecture, by Father Peter Gomez, S.J., a teacher of the Jesuit *collegio* in Funai (the present-day city of Oita). In 1601, at the age of fourteen, he entered the *seminario* in Nagasaki, together with a younger brother, John. After he completed his studies there five years later, in 1606, he became a *dojuku* of the Society of Jesus (an office similar to that of the *donne* of the French Jesuit missionaries in North America, e.g. St. Rene Goupil), and was sent to assist in the mission at Ikitsuki. He had already mastered Latin, and cherished the dream of being ordained a Jesuit priest.

In the year of his birth, 1587, Hideyoshi, who had succeeded Nobunaga as the most powerful lord of the nation, issued an edict banishing foreign missionaries from Japan. For many years, this edict was mostly ignored, but with the coming to power of Ieyasu and the Tokugawa clan, the policy of expelling Christian missionaries from the country became more strictly enforced. In 1612, an edict proscribing Christianity entirely was promulgated, followed two years later, in 1614, by another edict expelling Christian priests and religious, and even leading Christian laymen, from Japan. Thus, Peter, now twenty-seven, found himself on a ship bound for Macao, one of a company of 115 Portuguese missionaries, Japanese priests and religious, seminary students, and *dojuku*. At the beginning of their stay in Macao, Peter and a number of his companions attended classes in Latin taught by the Jesuits stationed in Macao. But in 1618, for a number of reasons, this instruction was terminated and the seminary was closed. The seminarians who had been looking forward to being ordained priests in Macao were greatly disappointed and had to decide what they would do next. Some decided to go to Manila and others to return to Japan. Peter Kibe and two other seminarians as enterprising as himself, Michael Minoes and Mancio Konishi, decided to go by ship to Goa in India and seek ordination there. When this too proved futile, they decided to make their way to Rome and try again. Michael and Mancio chose to go by ship, while Peter decided upon a land route. And so he traversed the length of India on foot, crossed over the Iranian desert, entered the Holy Land (becoming the first Japanese pilgrim to enter Jerusalem), then went by ship to Venice and walked from there to Rome, arriving at his destination in the fall of 1620.

Realization of the Dream of Becoming a Priest

“Should any of these three make it to Rome, do not be too quick to trust them or to champion their cause.” This is a quotation from a letter dated January 12, 1618, sent to Father General by a Jesuit priest who had been sent by him to Macao on official visitation. Father General, despite the above caution, seems to have been so greatly impressed with Peter Kibe that he arranged for him to enter the diocesan seminary of Rome and prepare

immediately for ordination. Thus it was that Peter was ordained deacon on November 8 of that same year (1620) at the Lateran Basilica, and on November 15, at the same place, priest. He was 33 years old. Five days after his ordination, on November 20, Father Kibe presented himself at St. Andrew Jesuit Novitiate, next-door to the Quirinal Palace in Rome, asking to be admitted. Admission was granted, and another long-held dream had come true..

Upon being admitted into the Jesuit noviceship, he was asked to answer in writing six questions that concerned his personal history. The answers Peter gave to these questions, short and to-the-point, have the power to move the hearts of us Jesuits today, who have followed in his footsteps.. Consider, for example, his answer to the sixth question, "Are you satisfied with your vocation?" "Yes, I am satisfied with the vocation God has given me, and I have great hope that I will be able to make progress on the way to my own salvation, and help my fellow Japanese make progress on their way to theirs." In those few lines, we sense the decisiveness, passion, love of and trust in God, and love of fellow man of the one who penned them.

The Voyage Home

In March of 1623, Peter Kibe, together with twenty other Jesuits, sailed out of the port of Lisbon. His destination was Japan, but he had a hard time getting there. Along the way he stopped off at Goa, Macao, Ayuthaya (present-day Thailand), and Manila, trying to find in each of these harbors a ship that would take him home, but he was always unsuccessful. When he reached Manila, in the fall of 1629, he fell in with Father Michael Matsuda, another Jesuit priest who was trying to find a way back to Japan. Together, the two priests got hold of a small sailboat and outfitted it the best they could for the long sail to Japan. Despite a last-minute discovery that their little boat was termite ridden, placing their trust in God's Providence, they set sail as planned when the favorable winds began to blow, in May of 1630. Providence did not disappoint them. Despite a horrendous storm as they neared Japan and the loss of their boat, which the winds hurled onto the volcanic mountains of an island and destroyed, thanks to the help of friendly natives who came to their rescue, the two priests managed to land safely on the coast of southern Kyushu at what is now Bonotsu. From there, they walked to Nagasaki, where they found that the persecution of the Christians had grown very intense. Father Matsuda remained in Nagasaki, where he would soon die a martyr's death, while Peter moved on to central Japan. In Fujimi, near Osaka, he had the good fortune of meeting and consulting with Diego Yuki Ryosetsu, a Jesuit confrere several years older than he and a priest of great pastoral experience. The latter urged him to go to the region around what is now Sendai and minister there. This was the fief of the great lord Date Masamune, who had showed favor to the Christians.. Ministering in that region were two Jesuits, Father John Porro and Martin Shikimi, and the Franciscan Francis Valez. Following Father Yuki's advice, Peter settled himself in the castle town of Mizusawa, where he arrived in October, 1633, just six years before he was martyred.

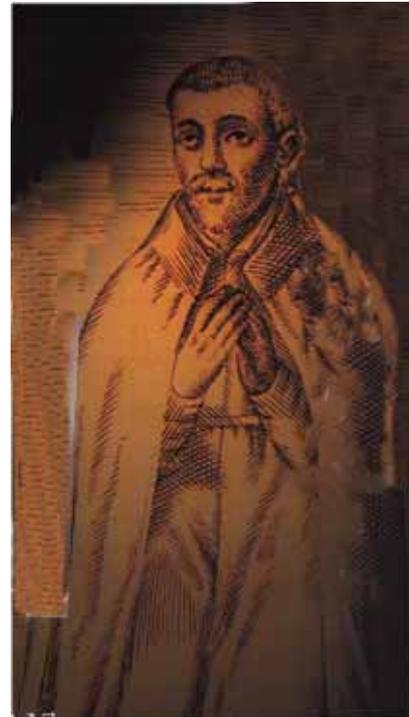
Martyrdom

Date Masamune died, and his son and successor did not share his father's lenient views of Christianity. It was he who, shortly after his succession, brought the harsh persecution of the Tokugawa *bakufu* to the Sendai area.

On March 17, 1639, Peter Kibe was arrested in the house where he had been concealed in the castle town of Mizusawa and sent to Edo (present-day Tokyo), where he was interrogated by the highest court in the land. Father Kibe and Fathers Porro and Shikimi, who had also been captured and sent to Edo, underwent numerous interrogation

sessions. When the priests could not be induced to renounce their faith, the interrogators began to grow desperate. According to one (not very reliable) source, they even brought Father Cristobal Ferreira, the Jesuit Provincial who had apostatized in the pit in Nagasaki, to Edo to convince the three Jesuits to do as he had done. The story goes that Peter turned the tables on him, and urged instead that Ferreira retract his apostasy and go to a martyr's death with him.

The Japanese sources make it clear that the *shogun* Iemitsu took great interest in the case and insisted on taking part in one or more of the interrogation sessions. Then, Iemitsu took the case out of the hands of the court and put it under the jurisdiction of his personal representative, Inoue Chikugo-no-kami. For ten successive days, Inoue made every effort to "brain-wash" the priests, but it was all to no avail. Finally, in desperation, he condemned all three of them to the pit, the torturing device that he himself had devised. This torture proved to be too much for Fathers Porro and Shikimi, and both apostatized. The details of their apostasy will probably never be known, but the two priests were kept in prison and never released, as they would most likely have been had they really apostatized.



Father Kibe, however, was not to be broken even in the pit. On the contrary, he continued to urge the two *dojuku* hanging there with him to remain firm in their faith. Finally, infuriated by Peter's persistence, the men guarding him pulled him out of the pit and killed him. How they killed him is not clear, but according to the account of a Portuguese ship captain, red-hot steel was applied to all parts of his body and this caused his death. Another Portuguese account has it that small dried faggots were piled on his bare stomach and set afire and when he still did not die, his torturers disembowelled him. Peter was 52 years old at the time of his death, and had spent 19 of those years in the Society of Jesus. It is ironical that the ace torturer, Inoue, in the report of Kibe's death which he sent to Iemitsu should have given Peter the epitaph that best summarizes his life: "Peter Kibe, the man who would not say, "I give in.""



(2) JULIAN NAKAURA

Julian Nakaura was a man of prayer. Prayer was a thread that ran all through his life, from beginning to end, binding into a meaningful whole the many facets and events that characterized it.

Julian is known to many in Japan as a member of the legation of four young men of samurai stock who traveled to and around Western Europe in the 16th century. His later life, however, was of quite a different nature from that of his early years. He became a Jesuit priest who, like St. Paul, endured great suffering because of his love for God, and who, to the very end, walked faithfully along the way God invited him to walk.

From Saikai-machi to Rome

On April 25, 1585, the four Japanese “youth ambassadors” were granted Roman citizenship. According to the copy of the certificate of citizenship preserved in the archives



of the Society of Jesus in Rome, Don Julian is the son of Don Jingoro, a distinguished samurai of the township of Nakaura (present-day Sakai-machi) in the province of Echizen. At that time, according to the certificate, he was eighteen years old. From this it is clear that he was born in 1567. His father was Kosasa Jingoro, a retainer of the Christian *daimyo* Otomo Sumitada and lord of the Nakaura castle, from which Julian gets his last name. Jingoro died in battle when Julian was only two years old, so Julian and his two sisters were raised by their devout mother, a very zealous Christian with great trust in the Providence of God. When he was twelve years old, Julian left home to study at the *seminario* in Arima. He was in the first class to enroll in the school, which had recently been founded to educate the sons of Christian samurai.

A modest and unassuming boy, he must have been greatly surprised when Father Alessandro Valignano included him in the group of four boys of the *seminario* he would take to Rome and other European cities as a kind of “youth legation” from Japan. The event of this eight-year-long adventure that Julian would remember with pleasure to the very end of his life was his audience with the Holy Father in Rome.

Just the day before the scheduled audience, Julian came down with a high fever. But believing that when he met the Pope, he would surely be healed, Julian ignored the advice of those around him that he stay in bed that day. Instead, he insisted on accompanying the others to the audience. In the end, he was the most favored of the four, because Pope Gregory XIII, learning of Julian’s illness, arranged to meet him in a private audience preceding the official one. Observers of the meeting of the two aver that, when the 84-year-old Pontiff saw the boy before him, unsteady on his legs and trembling with fever, he was so deeply moved that tears were seen running down his cheeks.

The legation set foot on Japanese soil after their long voyage on July 21, 1590. Father Valignano, who had not been able to accompany the boys to Europe because of unavoidable business in Goa, had re-joined them there. In Goa, he had received an appointment as “ambassador to Japan of the Vice-regent of India.” In this capacity, he was able to arrange an audience for them with Hideyoshi, who was in residence at Jurakutei Palace in Kyoto at the time. The audience took place on the morning of March 3, 1591. Hideyoshi was so impressed with the four “boys” that he proposed to keep them at his court. Julian, however, refused his offer. Strengthened in his faith by what he had experienced abroad, he had already made up his mind to serve God faithfully in his Church. The life he led after returning to Japan gives evidence of his sincerity and also of the firmness of his resolve.

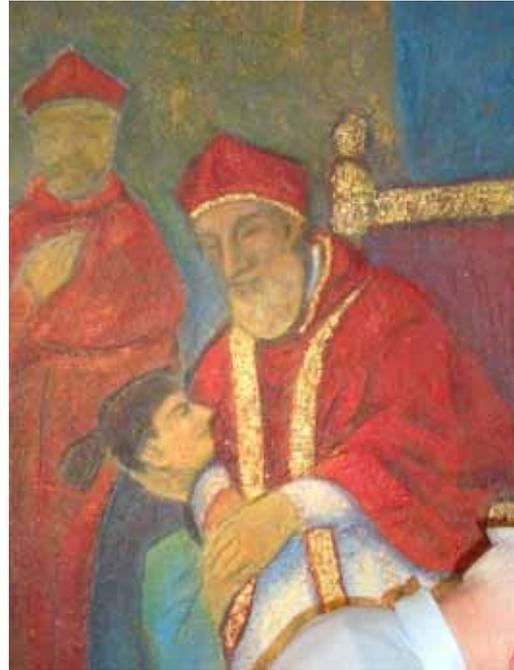
Jesuit Vows and Priestly Ordination

In 1591, the very year of his audience with Hideyoshi, Julian and the three other young men of the “legation” joined the Society of Jesus and entered the Jesuit novitiate in Amakusa. Two years later, Julian pronounced his first vows, and then was sent to Yatsushiro to begin his apostolic work as a Jesuit. In 1601, together with Ito Mancio, he was sent to Macao to study theology. In September of 1608, four years after his return from Macao, Julian was finally ordained a priest, 28 years after he had entered the *seminario* in Amakusa, and many years after others in his year had become priests. He was 41 years old.

Martyrdom

Julian’s road to martyrdom actually began in 1612, when Ieyasu promulgated his edict proscribing Christianity. It proved to be a very hard road. Before he finally received his martyr’s crown, he had to struggle through twenty years of great difficulties, years which, however, were years in which he also experienced many special blessings and helps from God.

In 1614, Ieyasu ordered the missionaries to leave the country. Not only the foreign missionaries, but also the native clergy and outstanding Christian laymen who gave moral support to the Christians, such as Takayama Ukon, were sent into exile to either Manila or Macao. On the other hand, twenty-six Jesuits, including Julian, either volunteered or were ordered to remain in the country in concealment and to minister clandestinely to the Christian communities.



The persecution grew more and more intense as the days passed. In a letter to Rome, Julian wrote that the situation was so bad that the priests were unable to find even a little time for rest from their ministries. It was under these circumstances that Julian pronounced his final vows in 1621. On the bottom of the sheet on which Julian wrote out his vows, we find the notation “February 21, 1621, during the Japanese persecution.” Can we not detect in this notation a fresh determination on Julian’s part to live out his vocation to the end?

In 1632, Julian was apprehended in Kokura and imprisoned in Nagasaki. After nine months in prison, he and seven other religious were put to the torture of the pit. Their bodies were bound tightly and then suspended upside down, with their heads submerged in shallow pits containing offal. Some Japanese-speaking Portuguese who observed the scene reported later that while hanging in the pit, Julian declared for all to hear: “I am Julian Nakaura, who went to Rome.” Thus, to the very end Julian treasured his “memories of the holy city of Rome, the Supreme Pontiff and the cardinals and the Catholic princes, and the acts of kindness and charity I experienced when I went there” (as he expressed it in a letter to Rome in 1621). Julian died on October 21, his fourth day in the pit. He was 62 years old.

When we look back over the path walked by Julian Nakaura, we see that it was a steep and narrow path with many ups and downs, but that he walked straight ahead,

steadily and without faltering, on the path the Holy Spirit pointed out to him. He advanced step by step with trust and hope in God, and the joy of knowing that God loved him. Finally, with Jesus as his companion, he reached its end and threw himself into the arms of the Father. :



(3) DIEGO YUKI RYOSETSU

He who would really live *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius must have a great trust in God and a love for Him that makes it impossible to deny Him anything. He must also have generosity, magnanimity, and courage. Diego Ryosetsu is a Japanese religious who can truly be said to have lived *The Spiritual Exercises*. He was a Jesuit of extraordinary character and culture, who had inherited from his forebears the intrepid and unyielding heart of the samurai. The more we learn about Diego Yuki, the more we are attracted to his person and to his way of life. This alumnus of our Province proffers many useful hints on how to live out as fully as possible our consecration as Jesuits in present-day Japan.

Diego Yuki Ryosetsu was born of noble lineage in 1574 in what is now Tokushima Prefecture. In 1586, at the age of twelve, he was sent to study at the *seminario* in Takatsuki, which was the fief of the outstanding Catholic layman, Takayama Ukon. Nine years later, in 1595, Jesuit Provincial Peter Gomez admitted Diego into the Society of Jesus, and he moved to the Jesuit novitiate in Amagasaki in Kyushu. From his earliest years in the Society he displayed a rare aptitude for and love of study. In the period of studies after first vows, he was such a good student that he rapidly moved ahead of his classmates, and even ahead of some of the seminarians in the class before him.

In the report on the scholastics in their care which superiors of the *seminario* sent to Rome in 1614, and which is still preserved in the Jesuit archives, we find the following paragraph on Diego Yuki Ryosetsu:

“Diego Ryosetsu. Born in Awa [present-day Tokushima]. 39 years old, 19 years in the Society, has completed three years of theology, has taught Latin for five years, has been ordained sub-deacon. He is well versed in Japanese literature, and his Japanese sermons are excellent.”

Diego accompanied Takayama Ukon into exile in the Philippines in 1614, and in the following year he was ordained a priest in Manila. He was 41 years old. In his report to Rome on Diego in 1616, Father Ledesma, Provincial of the Philippines, wrote:

“Father Yuki has an excellent character and is very zealous in his work. He is very exemplary and effective in his ministry among the Japanese. He returned to Japan a few days ago.”

As indicated in Father Ledesma’s report, Diego, eager to be of help to the suffering Church in his native land, did, in fact, smuggle himself back into Japan in 1616. In the Jesuit archives in Rome is a letter, dated August 2, 1615, which he wrote in Latin to Father General Aquaviva. In this letter, he touches upon several problems of the Church in Japan. Concerning the problem of a proper formation for Japanese Jesuits, he proposes that for the young scholastics, who are exhausted by the exigencies of living in a time of persecution, but who, at the same time, are enthusiastic about their studies, a house of formation be set up in Manila. He further urges that it is necessary to train Japanese to

teach these young seminarians, and that Jesuit headquarters should provide the financial means for making this possible. From these suggestions, we can see that Diego Yuki had clear insight into the distinctive nature of Japan and its special needs. Here is one of our alumni who had a clear vision of a Church in the future which would have adapted itself to Japanese culture.

Minister of the Sacraments



Returning to Japan, Diego had gone first to Nagasaki, but in the summer of that same year, 1616, he was sent to the church in Kyoto. From this time on, he would continue to watch over that church. From 1622 until 1635, when he was arrested, he would be the only priest left in the so-called *Gokinai* area. In the official reports sent to Rome in 1620 and 1625 is to be found a detailed account of his activities. In the earlier report, he is depicted as making the rounds of a vast territory—visiting the faithful, offering Mass for them, hearing their confessions, and encouraging them in their faith. In the second report, his “parish” has extended still further, and Diego is ministering to Christians in such distant places as Sado Island (near Niigata) and Tsugaru (present-day Aomori). It is written that everywhere Christians

flocked to him in great numbers to attend Mass and confess their sins. Wherever he went, he appointed lay people to take charge of parish administration, so that he could apply himself exclusively to sacramental ministry. In this way, he contributed greatly to developing a Japanese Church that could flourish even after priests became scarce or had disappeared entirely.

A Final Testimony

In 1635, Diego, betrayed by a kinsman who informed the bureau of his whereabouts, was arrested in Kagawa Prefecture in Shikoku and taken to Osaka and imprisoned. A member of the bureau of investigation in Nagasaki who was sent to Osaka to interrogate him later testified that to the very end Diego refused to reveal the names of those who had given him shelter. He kept re-iterating that, in his twenty years of traveling around the country tending his flock, he had slept in the hills or the fields and had warded off starvation by eating what nature could provide him. He spoke with such conviction and self-assurance that his interrogators believed him, and so none of his benefactors were made to share his fate.

In early February of 1635, Diego was condemned to the pit, and after three days of terrible torture there, he joined the glorious band of martyrs. He was 62 years old, and 41 of those years had been spent in the Society of Jesus, 21 of them as a priest. Moreover, almost all of his life as a priest had been spent in clandestine ministry.

Diego Yuki Ryosetsu was absorbed in things academic for the first half of his life, and even went to the extent of concerning himself with the academic formation of young Jesuits, and with the future of the Church of Japan. He was sufficiently concerned about these matters to make proposals to Jesuit superiors in Rome as to how the situation could be improved. But as the persecution of the Christians grew in severity, he became almost entirely absorbed in pastoral concerns. Much as he loved the Jesuit community, he turned his back upon it and chose for himself the lonely life of the Good Shepherd, going out in search of the sheep who were in need of his ministrations. For twenty years, he traveled around the country, sleeping and even eating in the fields, so that, like his Master, he had no place to call his home. Therefore, it is symbolic of the nature of his vocation that at the end he would not reveal the names of even those few who had given him shelter. Finally, also like Christ, he too was betrayed by someone whom he had trusted and led to the living waters. Can we not affirm, then, that in his faithful service of the Lord and fellow man, Diego Yuki Ryosetsu was, as we stated above, the very model of a Japanese who is possessed by the spirit of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*?



(4) NICHOLAS KEIAN FUKUNAGA

Our Lord has a way of selecting average people who do not seem to excel in anything and transforming them into bright stars that illuminate the darkness about them. Nicholas Keian Fukunaga was such a person. Had he not lived in a time of religious persecution, he would probably have been just an ordinary religious, no different from any other, and ended his life almost entirely unacclaimed. In their reports to Rome, superiors regularly rated him “ordinary.” He studied for the priesthood, but he was never ordained. He went with the expelled Jesuits to Macao, but was sent back to Japan after he expressed a difference of opinion with superiors. The work assigned to him was always to help other Jesuits. He did not receive permission to pronounce his final vows until he had been 37 years in the Society and was 50 years of age. In spite of all this, he succeeded in incarnating the essence of Christ’s gospel. He did this, first of all, by means of his powerful sermons based on the Word of God, but he did this even more effectively by the moving testimony that his martyr’s death gave to the truth of the words which he spoke.



Nicholas Keian Fukunaga was born in 1569 in Omi (in what is now Shiga Prefecture). He is said to have been of samurai stock, but his antecedents are not clear. What we do know for certain is that he studied at the *seminario* in Azuchi, and that in

1588, at the age of 18, he was received into the Society of Jesus and entered the Jesuit novitiate in Amagusa. Several years ahead of him in the Society but also studying in Amagusa were St. Paul Miki and Blessed Sebastian Kimura, who would also become martyrs. While he was a novice, the Christian lord Takayama Ukon came to their novitiate to make the *Spiritual Exercises* and remained for a time to join the novices in their various exercises.

In 1590, Nicholas made his first vows and moved on to study in the *collegio*. In his second year of the Latin course, Mancio Ito and Julian Nakaura, two members of the "youth legation" that had traveled to Europe, were his classmates. In 1603, Nicholas was sent to the newly established Jesuit house in Fukuoka and given the assignment of preaching in the church. Julian Nakaura was ordained a priest in 1608 and sent to work in Fukuoka, and Nicholas is said to have been of great help to him in his work there.

In 1614, when Hideyoshi expelled the missionaries, Nicholas went with them to Macao, where he was put in charge of the formation of the *dojuku*. In 1620, he managed to return secretly from exile, and he was teamed with Blessed Sixtus Iyo and Brother Gaspar Sadamatsu and sent to work again in Fukuoka

In 1633, Nicholas fell into the hands of the Nagasaki bureau and thrown into the pit. It was while he was in the pit that Nicholas, the good preacher, had the last word in his dialogue with his jailers. Asked by them if there was not something in his life that he regretted, Nicholas replied, "Yes, I regret very much that I was unable to lead all the Japanese, beginning with the *shogun*, to Christ." On the morning of his third day in the pit, July 31, the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Nicholas joined the founder of his order in heaven.

It is interesting to note the changing assessment superiors give of Nicholas in their reports to Rome. In the earliest report, they wrote simply: "He is able to preach." In a later report, we find: "He preaches powerful sermons in Japanese." But in the final assessment of Nicholas Keian Fukunaga which was sent to Rome in the official record of the Japanese martyrs compiled in Macao, we read: "He continued to preach Christ to the Japanese officials to the very end, and his martyrdom was his most powerful sermon of all."

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In these few pages, we have chosen to fix our eyes, not so much on the way these martyrs died as on the way they lived. Our four Jesuit martyrs died in very much the same way, but each followed a different path to arrive at his destination. Herein, it seems to me, lies a sweet mystery which we Jesuits of today are challenged to savor.

About the Author

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