

Japan Pilgrimage , October 8-16, 2023



SATURDAY OCTOBER 7 AND SUNDAY OCTOBER 8

Some of us flew to Los Angeles on October 7 and stayed in the Embassy Suites Hotel near the airport where others met up with us. Canon celebrated Sunday Mass in a hotel room, and then we took taxis to the airport. Our ANA (All Nippon Airlines) flight left on LAX Sunday, Oct. 8 at 4:50 PM.



MONDAY OCTOBER 9

Japan time is 16 hours ahead of the Pacific Daylight Time zone where we started. So when we arrived at our Hotel Niwa in Tokyo at 11 PM on Monday, the time was 7 AM back in California on PDT. Canon's mother was waiting for us there. She had come by train from Kobe, 350 miles away, which is where Canon grew up and the family still owns a home, to travel with us.

Mrs. Ueda's Japanese name is Eiko, but—as she told us—she took the Christian name Paulina when she was baptized on the same day as Canon Ueda in 1995.



TUESDAY OCTOBER 10

The Church of St. Francis Xavier in Kanda is a short walk from the hotel and we attended Mass there. St. Francis Xavier, S.J., who co-founded the Jesuit order with St. Ignatius of Loyola, was Japan's first missionary. He arrived on August 15, 1549, five years after the country's first contact with Europeans. By 1575, there were 100,000 Catholics in Japan. By 1587, there were 200,000. By 1613, there were 370,000. Starting in 1597, the government mounted vicious and prolonged persecutions that eventually destroyed the outward practice of the faith for two hundred and fifty years, after many were deported and many others died as martyrs.

St. Francis Xavier Church was established in 1874, the second church built in Tokyo after the ban on Christianity was lifted. The first building was damaged in an earthquake in 1923. The current church was completed in 1928.

After Mass, we prayed at a side altar that contains relics of St. Francis Xavier in a reliquary designed to look like the outside of the church.

We walked along city streets, crossed over the lovely Kanda River waterway, and then descended into the maze of the subway system to get to the Church of Our Lady of the Martyrs in Tankakawa. That church is dedicated to the Great Edo (Tokyo) Martyrs and is near where fifty Catholics were burned at the stake four hundred years ago on Dec. 4, 1623. We prayed a rosary there.

In the crypt under the Church, we visited small museum of artifacts from the history of Catholic Japan and a painting of the Edo martyrdom of the fifty Catholics. A total of four to five hundred Catholic priests and laity were burned on stakes in Edo that same year.

We then visited the busy Shibuya Station area, and we bought lunch from some of the scores of small restaurants in the underground Tokyo department store above the station. Many people took photos of the nearby statue honoring the famous dog Hachikō, who waited every evening at the station after his master died at work one day.



WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 11

After a drive past the Imperial Palace, the Kokyo Gaien National Garden, and the Metropolitan Shiba Park, we flew to Nagasaki.

In Nagasaki, we visited St. Philip's Church (which is also referred to as the Twenty-Six Martyrs Church —although the Oura Church built earlier in Nagasaki was the first and only church in the city officially dedicated under that name). The accidental arrival in 1596 of St. Philip, after his ship was wrecked on the Japanese coast, precipitated the martyrdom remembered here. Philip was a Mexican seminarian traveling on the *San Felipe*, a Spanish ship, from the Philippines—where he had studied for the priesthood—to Mexico to be ordained. When the ship wrecked on the Japanese coast, the discovery of arms and soldiers on the ship alarmed the government. The pilot of the ship imprudently told Japanese authorities that it was Spanish tactic to have missionaries infiltrate a country before an eventual military conquest. His remarks sparked a crackdown on Catholicism that began with the martyrdom of St. Philip and twenty-five companions on February 5, 1597.

The church is on Nishizaka Hill, adjacent to the site of the killing of the 26 Martyrs. Nishizaka Hill was also the place of martyrdom for many other Catholics during ensuing waves of persecution.

After Canon Ueda celebrated Mass, we venerated a large gold reliquary that displays some bones of St. Paul Miki, St. John Goto, and St. Jacob Kisai. The museum and church were designed by an architect who was influenced by Gaudi's work. Like Gaudi, he embedded all kinds of objects in the facade, including Western crockery, which you can see in photos of the two towers.

Down Nishizaka hill from the church, at a large monument with bas relief bronze statues of the 26 martyrs, a docent from the adjacent museum and Fr. Francis Furusato, a Japanese Franciscan, gave us a talk. The martyrs had been arrested in Kyoto, had their left ears cut off, and were forced to walk six miles to Nagasaki barefoot in the snow, in hopes that would demoralize anyone who witnessed their humiliation. It instead was an inspiration. The martyrs were tied to crosses and then lanced to death. Three of the martyrs were boy altar servers, the youngest only 12 years old.

Catholicism was then officially outlawed. Clergy and professing Catholics were driven out of the country or killed. Other Catholics fled or were banished to remote areas and the practice of the faith was driven underground.

We also visited the 26 Martyrs Museum, which has artifacts from St. Francis Xavier's time to modern days. After we arrived, a hundred uniformed children on a field trip during school vacation swarmed in and milled around the exhibits.

During the rest of our stay, Fr. Francisco took time off from his ministry to the homeless, and he volunteered to chauffeur the three elder women on the tour, whose ages ranged from the late 70s to the early 90s to all the remaining sites.

After we all checked in at the Portuguese Hotel Monterey—a reminder that the Portuguese used Nagasaki as their main port for trading in Japan—we dined at the Nagasaki Crown Plaza. The food and the service were great. A few of us had saki, Japanese rice wine, for the first time.





THURSDAY OCTOBER 12

After Mass we drove to visit St. Francis Xavier Memorial Church on Hirado Island, where many were baptized.

Tabira Church on the mainland of Hirado was the second church we visited on Thursday. It is another church dedicated to the Twenty-Six Martyrs, but like others, it is usually identified only by the name of the place where it is located.

Tabira became a center for Catholicism after the end of the ban against Christianity. It became home to many formerly underground Catholics families from different villages around Japan, who transformed the wasteland into a thriving Catholic village.

The Romanesque-style brick church was designed by a leading church architect in Japan at that time, and it was built with the laypeople's labor in 1918. The bricks were laid with amakawa, a red mortar handmade from red clay and lime obtained by burning sea shells. We prayed the rosary there.



FRIDAY OCTOBER 13

We visited Hara Castle Ruins, on the Shimabara peninsula, which commemorates the Shimabara Rebellion. After the rebellion failed, 37,000 mostly Catholic men, women and children were decapitated. The castle was then buried along with all the dead. It is a disturbing thought to realize that you are walking where so many were slaughtered and lie buried.

We also visited the statue nearby called “Holy Mary Kannon of Hara Castle.” It is the largest wooden statue of Our Lady in the World, at 32.5 ft. tall. The sculptor built it because he thought it wrong that there were no memorials to the dead at Hara Castle. You can read more about Shimabara Rebellion and the creation of St. Mary Kannon of Hara Castle here. <https://open.substack.com/pub/roseannetsullivan/p/st-mary-kannon-of-hara-castle>

The third site we visited on Friday was Unzen Hot Springs. The Unzen Hells are spots on a volcano where steam and hot gasses spurt from the ground, and here many Christian martyrs were tortured with the boiling waters in the years between 1627 and 1632.

You can read more about the tortures a Unzen Hell here in an article published by the Knights of the Immaculata press. <https://militia-immaculatae.asia/english/Biographysaints85.php>