

FRIDAY OCTOBER 13

You can read about the first martyrdom here: “28 FEBRUARY 1627: THE FIRST MARTYRDOM AT UNZEN HELL <https://kirishtan.com/28-february-1627-the-first-martyrdom-at-unzen-hell/>

Fr. Furusato showed photo stills from the movie *The Silence* at various spots that were locations for the film. He told our group about five Franciscan Priests who were tortured with boiling water and then marched to Nagasaki to be crucified on Nishizaka Hill.



SATURDAY OCTOBER 14

On this day, we visited several sites associated with St. Maximilian Kolbe's sojourn in Japan. St. Kolbe is best known as "the saint of Auschwitz" and as a "martyr of charity," who offered his life in place of a family man in 1941. Few realize that St. Kolbe had previously spent the years between 1930 and 1936 in Nagasaki, where he built a monastery in the Nagasaki suburb of Hongouchi. In keeping with his practice of using the latest technology to spread the faith and devotion to Our Lady, he started publishing a journal in Japanese that is still produced there today. Canon Ueda celebrated a Mass in the Hongouchi Church.

At the museum we got the opportunity to sit in his chair at the desk where he worked and to see the original press he used. He also built a Lourdes Grotto above and behind the friary which some of us visited who were able to climb some even-steeper-than usual stairs.

You can read more about his work there in "Maximilian Kolbe in Japan" here. <https://benedictinstitute.org/2021/07/st-maximilian-kolbe-in-japan/>

Then we visited the Oura Cathedral and the adjacent Museum. Oura Cathedral, the first church named after the Twenty Six Martyrs, was erected in 1865 by French missionary Fr. Bernard Petijean. They built it to face Nishizaka hill, the site of the martyrdom. The church was intended originally to serve European Catholic merchants residing in Nagasaki.

Then on March 17, 1865, shortly after the completion of the cathedral, a group of people came to see Fr. Petjean, and he learned they were from the nearby village of Urakami and were Kakure Kirishitans, Hidden Christians, the descendants of Japanese Christians who were forced to hide their faith after the Shimabara Rebellion in order to survive.

Soon, tens of thousands of underground Christians came out of hiding in the Nagasaki area. News of this reached Pope Pius IX, who declared this "the miracle of the Orient."

Unfortunately, the ban on Christianity was still in effect, and persecutions of the newly revealed Kakure Kirishitans began again. The missionaries at Oura Cathedral successfully petitioned consulates of Western countries represented in Japan to help stop these persecutions. The government lifted the ban in 1873 in response to increasing criticism, eventually putting an end to the suppression of Christianity.

Up to 50,000 descendants of the original Hidden Christians had continued secretly practicing their faith, even though they chose to apostatize every year in the Fumi-e tests that were administered across the nation to weed out Christians and sympathizers. Fumi-e images were either of Christ crucified or of Our Lady, and every year, everyone had to stomp on one of those images. The hidden Christians and their forebears had pragmatically done as they were told, because those who did not were banished, tortured, or martyred. They were ashamed of apostatizing, and they tried to keep the faith as best they can with various strategies to avoid discovery.

The faith of the Hidden Christians became transformed over the centuries. During the over two hundred years without priests or printed materials, which would have been confiscated, the practice of the underground Catholics evolved into mix of Buddhist, Shintoist, animistic, and Catholic rituals in which the meaning of the Latin words of prayers and of the rituals had been lost.

The French missionaries began the work of re-evangelization. The museum adjacent to Oura church is the former site of a Latin Seminary to train Japanese priests and of a Catechist School to equip laity, whose graduates would minister to the Hidden Christian communities. Varying estimates say from 30% to 50% did not rejoin the Catholic Church, and several groups of synchronist adherents to the old ways still exist in tiny numbers to this day.

We also visited the hut where St. Kolbe stayed for his first year in Nagasaki, before he got the land in Hongouchi to build his monastery.



## SUNDAY OCTOBER 15

After climbing many steep steps, we visited Cross Hill, also called Cross Mountain, which was designated a place of pilgrimage by Pope Pius XII. In September 1881, an altar, a cross, and stations of the cross were erected there by local Christians, who dragged the six-ton rocks used in the construction up the steep incline, to atone for having trampled on the Fumi-e in the yearly examinations, and also to offer persecuting government authorities their forgiveness, to thank God for the end to the long persecution, and to proclaim their Christian faith.

Canon Ueda led us all in the Stations of the Cross.

We then visited the small hut-like former home of Servant of God, Dr. Takashi Nagai, a radiologist whose sickness from handling X-rays, combined with the radiation he experienced in 1945 after the bomb dropped, brought him close to death, until what seems to be a miracle happened. He heard a voice telling him to pray to Maximillian Kolbe. He had met Fr. Kolbe when he X-rayed the future saint who was sick throughout his life with TB, but he did not know what happened to Kolbe after he left Japan in 1936. After he prayed, he was healed enough to live on for several years with his children in that small hut. Confined to bed, and almost helpless, he wrote books after the war that proclaimed his view that the Nagasaki bombing and the deaths of so many Catholics on August 9, 1945 was a holocaust that God accepted and that brought an end to the war in Japan, which surrendered on August 15, the feast of the Assumption. He is venerated as a messenger of peace instead of hatred.

We also visited the Dr. Takashi Nagai Museum next door.

Sunday, we also visited the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum and Peace Park.

Finally, we visited the Urakami cathedral, which was built starting in 1958, after the previously much larger cathedral was destroyed when the bomb exploded on August 9, 1945. The bomb and the resulting fire killed most of the Catholics living in what had been for centuries the most densely Catholic part of Japan.

In 1895, the Catholic community at Urakami began building the first cathedral at that site, choosing the location because it was the land of the village chief where the yearly fumi-e interrogations had been done. They chose it in shamed memory of the long years of humiliating tests of their faith on that spot, tests they must have failed or they wouldn't have survived. The work and expense of building the cathedral was undertaken in what was in large part a penance for the repeated yearly public apostasies most of them and their ancestors had committed.

In the cathedral, Canon Ueda celebrated Holy Mass in the Hibakusha Maria Chapel, in which the burned and eyeless head of a statue of Mary (called Hibaku no Maria, Atomic Bomb Mary) is displayed behind the altar after it was miraculously found in the ruins of the bombed cathedral. You can read more about Hibaku no Maria here. <https://open.substack.com/pub/roseannetsullivan/p/hibaku-no-maria-atom-bombed-mary>

Fr. Furusato pointed out the wall plaque with the names of priests and parishioners who died from the Atomic Bomb.

## MONDAY OCTOBER 16

After one last Mass in the charming tiny chapel at the Monterey Hotel, Canon Ueda returned to Kobe with his mother to visit for a few more weeks and the rest of us flew back to Tokyo. At the Haneda airport, most of us caught an ANA flight back to LA after an eight-hour layover, which many of us used for souvenir shopping and sampling of more Japanese food in the airport. Back in LAX, we made our various connecting flights back to our homes.





10-16: Hotel Monterey Chapel, Nagasaki