



GUIDE FOR THE CELEBRATION

BLESSED MARTYRS OF JAPAN



CALLED TO BE SAINTS

BLESSED MARTYRS OF JAPAN MEMORIAL

READINGS:

Hb 11,1-2.35b40;12,1-3
Ps. 125
Jn 15,18-21.26-27

MONITION

It was in 1623 when the first batch of the Recollect missionaries arrived in Japan. As the Augustinian Recollect life was taking form among the natives persecution arose. On September 3, 1632, Francisco de Jesús and Vicente de San Antonio were martyred. The same luck happened on December 11 of the same year to Martin of San Nicolás and Melchor de San Agustín, who had just then arrived in Japan. They were all burned alive. There were also lay Augustinian Recollects who did not hesitate to give up their lives for confessing their faith in Jesus Christ.

The saints, who followed the footsteps of Christ, live joyfully in heaven. They shed their blood for their love; therefore they rejoice with Christ for ever.

As we celebrate this year the 150th anniversary of the beatification of Francisco de Jesús and Vicente de San Antonio we thank the Lord once again for our brothers and sisters, who today are for us a model of Christian and religious life, and we ask that their example and intercession may strengthen us in the path of holiness, to which we have all been called by Baptism.

INTRODUCTION TO THE READINGS

The Liturgy of the Word, on the feast of the Blessed Martyrs of Japan, points out that following Christ means taking the narrow path, marked by persecution and suffering, as shown by the example of the Master who suffered and died on the cross in fidelity to the mission entrusted to him by the Father. In this way, the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that faith is the driving force for us believers with eyes fixed on the one who calls us to be saints, hoping that he himself will give his faithful the prize they deserve and the reward for all their sufferings.

HOMILY POINTERS

- Today's liturgy is reminiscent of a group of the Augustinian Family beatified by Pope Pius IX in 1867. The Catholic missions, begun by Francis Xavier in 1549, were creating communities of living faith. The first Augustinian missionaries arrived in Japan in 1602. The people listened attentively and many embraced the faith. A few years later, the first Japanese vocations for the Augustinian life emerged.
- Then a violent persecution against Catholics broke out, and between 1617 and 1637 hundreds of Augustinians and Augustinian Recollects shed their blood for

confessing Christ. Father Pedro de Zúñiga was burned alive in 1622 and in September 1632, the same fate fell on the fathers Bartolomé Gutierrez, Francisco de Jesus Terrero and Vicente de San Antonio Simoens.

- The memory of this group of martyrs reflects the universality of the Church and the Augustinian life - they came from Spain, Mexico, Portugal and Japan - as well as the communion of life between the Augustinian religious and Augustinian Recollects and their respective secular branches.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

In memory of the blessed martyrs of Japan, presbyters and companions, all martyrs of Christ, let us pray to God the Father.

1. For the Church; so that she may be strengthened by the testimony of the martyrs: let us pray to the Lord.
R /. We pray you, hear us!
2. For Christians who suffer persecution or social discrimination for their fidelity to the Gospel; so that they may be strengthened by the trial: we pray to the Lord.
R /. We pray you, hear us!
3. For those who conceal their status as believers for fear of misunderstanding; so that the admirable example of the martyrs will stimulate and encourage them: let us pray to the Lord.
R /. We pray you, hear us!
4. For the missionaries of our Order, and for those who dedicate their lives to the proclamation of the Gospel; so that their preaching, like that of the martyrs, may bear more Christians: let us pray to the Lord.
R /. We pray you, hear us!
5. For all of us; so that we may imitate the zeal of the martyrs, and that their testimony may comfort us in the trials of each day: we pray to the Lord.
R /. We pray you, hear us!

Grant us, Father, through the intercession of the blessed martyrs of Japan, to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel of your Son in the world; let us know how to serve our brothers in truth, love and the fulfillment of your will. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

TEXTS FROM OUR SAINTS

From the letters and reports of the blessed martyrs of Japan

"On the eighteenth of November last year, sixteen hundred and nine," Blessed Francisco de Jesus said, "they took me to the mountains of Yukinoura, eleven leagues from the city of Nagasaki, and from there eight days later they arrested my companion Fray Vicente. They took us to the house of the governor of Nagasaki, where Father Bartolomé Gutierrez, our observer, and a Japanese priest of the Society of Jesus with some other Christians were imprisoned. In a matter of one month from then to now we have had a thousand new ones: since they banished us to that land (Philippines), since our death was

not meant to come this year, since they would kill us later. But a Portuguese gentleman (Captain Jerónimo de Macedo), who was released in August and is in Nagasaki, warned us today that, from the mouth of the tyrant, with whom he professes friendship, he heard that our feast and wedding were to happen this year by the start of November. The good news was for us of great consolation and joy. So, through the mercy of our good God and Lord, we are all with firm hopes of enjoying what we so desire, not to lose what we were created for. Since everything is a gift of our good God, freely given, I give thanks through Him and infinite thanks. "

On September 2, 1961, an agent of Governor Unemedono confided to them about the death sentence: "The emperor orders that in the place already prepared the six will be burned alive, if they do not first leave the law which they have preached; but if they renounce it, they will be at once free and favored and honored by the emperor. " They listened happily to the sentence and answered unanimously: "We want to give our lives to Jesus Christ and His holy law."

On the same day Father Vicente wrote to his Portuguese friends the following declaration signed by all: "Praise be to the Blessed Sacrament. To God be honor and glory, I say that on Thursday, September 2, the tyrant's right-hand man arrived saying that the place of martyrdom was prepared where tomorrow or the next day the sentence of burning us alive will be executed as ordered by the emperor. However, he warned us that if we renounced, we would be free and rewarded. We all answered together that the life we have we would give it to God, and that anytime they wanted to take it away we were ready and glad to give it for his love, his law and the Gospel.

May the Lord of mercy be praised for the wonders with which He uses us, so unworthy of them as he is generous and merciful in doing them. We urge all of you to entrust us to God. Fray Vicente de San Antonio, Fray Bartolomé Gutiérrez, Fray Francisco de Jesus, Jeronimo de la Cruz, Ygida Antonio, Fray Gabriel. Until death, and even til death there is no denying. "

PRAYER FOR CONTEMPLATION

On several occasions we are told that the martyrs sang the Laudate. It is said, for example, that Francis chanted every time that the corrosive water of the Unzen Hell was poured on them. And, through his Gregorian music, he survived to the present, despite the persecution of centuries. It is Psalm 117 (116), the shortest and easiest to remember. It is the psalm of the martyrs; it may well express today the heartfelt prayer of our community:

*Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes.
Laudate eum, omnes populi,
Quoniam confirmata est
Super nos misericordia eius
Et veritas Domini manet in aeternum.
¡Aleluya!*

Praise the LORD, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
Praise the LORD!

