

# Japan- THE FORBIDDEN COUNTRY

In 1597, during the regime of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Supreme Military Commander of Japan, 26 Christians, including 6 Franciscans, three Jesuits, and 17 laymen, were crucified because of their Christian faith in the city of Nagasaki. In 1627 they were beatified by Pope Urban VIII, and in 1862 were canonized by Pope Pius IX.

Seventeen years later, another ruler of Japan, Tokugawa Yeyasu, issued in 1614 the Decree on general persecution against Christianity which was enforced for the next two and a half centuries with increasing vigor. Thousands and thousands of Christians were executed for the faith between 1614 and 1640, among whom 205 who died between 1617 and 1632 were beatified by Pope Pius IX in 1867.

Between the years 1633 and 1640, more priests, religious and laymen shed their blood generously for God and the religious cause during the heightened persecution, and among them were 16 Servants of God who were not included in the beatification of 205 martyrs. These were Domingo Ibañez de Erquicia and his companions, executed in the years 1633, 1634 and 1637, because of their Christian faith, and who were not beatified during the century of their death.

**What made Japan a forbidden country to the missionaries?**

On August 15, 1549, St. Francis Xavier arrived in Japan. His arrival marked the birth of the Catholic mission of Japan, and when he left three years later, the foundations of a flourishing mission had been laid down.

Since 1555, the Portuguese had started a lucrative trade with Japan and with them came missionaries. In 1582, the then ruling Shogun was Toyotomi Hideyoshi who was at first friendly with Christianity but suddenly he became its persecutor. Tokugawa Yeyasu who succeeded him on his death in 1598 was thoroughly Buddhist and all missionaries were ordered to leave Japan or face the consequences. His Decree of general persecution against Christianity said the Christian religion was wicked, its followers had insulted Buddhism and destroyed the good in Japan, and should be eliminated. All Christians were to renounce their religion and have their names inscribed in the Buddhist sects. Anyone contravening the order would be punished with the penalty of death. Churches were then demolished after the departure of the missionaries and their catechists, cemeteries were destroyed, and images and crosses and other Christian symbols broken.

In 1600, a new European power, the Dutch, appeared on the scene to gain some control of the Japanese commerce. They were enemies of Spain and Portugal and were decidedly Protestants. From their factory in Kyushu, they never ceased to intrigue against the presence of the "papistical" Catholic missionaries. And among the Buddhist counsellors of Shogun Yeyasu were some who listened to their Dutch friends who said that the missionaries were the advance guard of Spain and Portugal for the ultimate conquest of Japan. Thus year after year, scores of Japanese Christians suffered the supreme penalty and in 1617, the first four European missionaries met martyrdom, significantly one from each of the four religious orders. The Japanese authorities thought that the dramatic executions would intimidate the faithful.

The mass execution continued and the years 1627-1634 were the most terrible since the outbreak of the persecution, not only on account of the number of victims but with regard to the atrocity of the torture inflicted on them.

The authorities had recourse to a variety of inhuman tortures: branding, burning, sawing of limbs with a bamboo saw, parading the victims through the villages, forced to expose their naked mutilated bodies, while some were thrown in icy waters to be frozen to death, or thrown in the boiling sulphur springs of Mount Unzen, in the Nagasaki region.

Three kinds of torments were commonly applied since 1632. The first was the water torture, whereby huge quantities of water were forced into the victim's stomach by means of a funnel until it was extremely swollen. Then the sufferer was made to lie on the ground, and two ministers would step on both ends of a board placed over the stomach, forcing the water out most violently through all bodily exits. The torture was repeated as often as the victim refused to recant.

The second torture was the torment of the steel needles which were thrust in every finger to both hands between

the flesh and the nails until the middle of the finger. Some minister would then touch the needles with a stick as if playing a guitar.

The third torture was the *ana-tsurushi* or hanging in the pit, where the victim was hung from a crossbeam of a gallows, head downward into a pit. The body was tightly bound to slow down the circulation of the blood. Then the mouth of the pit was closed with boards cut to adjust to the waist, and in this way the torture was endured for several days until the victim succumbed.

Among those who suffered these three methods of torture with exemplary fortitude were Fr. Domingo Ibañez de Erquicia and his 15 companions who are included in the same beatification Cause, as follows with dates of their martyrdom:

1. Fr. Domingo Ibañez de Erquicia, O.P.	Spanish,	Aug. 14, 1633.
2. Bro. Francisco Shoyemon, O.P.	Japanese,	Aug. 14, 1633.
3. Fr. Jacobo Kyushie de Santa Maria, O.P.	Japanese,	Aug. 17, 1633.
4. Fr. Miguel Kurobiyoe, O.P., catechist,	Japanese,	Aug. 17, 1633.
5. Fr. Lucas del Espiritu Santo, O.P.,	Spanish,	Oct. 19, 1633.
6. Bro. Mateo Kohioye del Rcaño, O.P.	Japanese,	Oct. 19, 1633.
7. Sister Magdalena, O.P.	Japanese,	Oct. 15, 1634.
8. Sister Marina de Orma, O.P.,	Japanese,	Nov. 11, 1634.
9. Fr. Jordan de San Esteban, O.P.,	Italian,	Nov. 17, 1634.
10. Fr. Tomas Hijo de San Jacinto, O.P.,	Japanese,	Nov. 17, 1634.
11. Fr. Antonio Gonzales, O.P.,	Spanish,	Sept. 24, 1637.
13. Fr. Guillermo Courtel, O.P.,	French,	Sept. 29, 1637.
14. Fr. Miguel de Aozaraza, O.P.,	Spanish,	Sept. 29, 1637.
15. Fr. Vicente Shiwozuka de la Cruz, O.P.	Japanese,	Sept. 29, 1637.
16. Lorenzo Ruiz, layman,	Filipino,	Sept. 29, 1637.
16. Lazaro of Kyoto, layman,	Japanese,	Sept. 29, 1737.

#### Brief biographies

##### 1. DOMINGO IBAÑEZ DE ERQUICIA, O.P. (Dominican priest).

He was born in Regil, (Guipuzcoa, diocese of San Sebastian, Spain) in the early part of February, 1589. In 1605 he joined the Dominican Order, and in 1611 arrived in the Philippines, where he worked zealously in the various apostolate missions in Luzon and at one time was professor at the Colegio de Santo Tomas (Now University of Santo Tomas) in Manila. He left for Japan in 1623 where the persecution of Christians was at its height. For ten years, as Vicar of the Dominican mission, he showed heroic dedication in comforting, and administering the Sacraments to the Christians, reconciling the apostates and generally exercising his priestly functions under the most painful and difficult circumstances. Continually hunted by the Japanese authorities and ardently desiring martyrdom, he was captured on July 1633 and imprisoned in Nagoya (Omura, Kyushu). When he was brought to Nagasaki, and after refusing to

renounce his faith, he was subjected to the torture of *ana-tsurushi*, and under this torment he expired the following day. His body was reduced to ashes.

##### 2. FRANCISCO SHOYEMON, O.P. (Dominican lay-brother)

He was born in Japan, but the date and place is not known. He was a catechist and constant apostolate companion of Fr. Domingo de Erquicia. In July 1633 he was imprisoned with Fr. Domingo, and in prison joined the Dominican Order. On August 13 of the same year he suffered the torment of *ana-tsurushi*, and expired the following day. His body was quartered with the *katana*, and thrown into the fire.

##### 3. FR. JACOBO KYUSHIE GOROBIOYE TOMANAGA DE SANTA MARIA, O.P. (Dominican Priest).

He was born in 1582 in Kydetsu (Kyushu, Japan) of Christian parents. In his youth he worked in the apostolate of catechism. In 1614 he went to Manila, aspiring for more perfection, and was admitted to the Dominican Order, and ordained priest in 1626. In 1632 he returned to his native country, risking his life in the service of God. After a year of apostolate work under the most difficult conditions, danger, suffering and privations, he was apprehended through information under torture of his own catechist Miguel Kurobiyoe, and placed in prison on July 1633. He was subjected to the torture of *ana-tsurushi*, where he expired after two days of agony on August 17, 1633. His body was burned and the ashes thrown into the sea.

##### 4. MIGUEL KUROBIOYE, layman

He was a Japanese, helper and catechist of Fr. Jacobo de Santa Maria. In this evangelical work, he accompanied Fr. Jacobo for three months until he was imprisoned in June 1633. Under torture, he disclosed the hiding-place of Fr. Jacobo. But because he refused to renounce his faith, he was sentenced to die under the torture of the gallows and the pit (*ana-tsurushi*) on August 15, 1633.

##### 5. FR. LUCAS DEL ESPIRITU SANTO, O.P. (Dominican priest)

He was born in Carracedo (Zamora, diocese of Astorga, Spain) on October 18, 1594. He was professed in the Dominican Order on July 2, 1611. Volunteering

## Japan --- continuation

for service in the Orient, he came to the Philippines in 1618 and worked with exemplary zeal in the missions in Luzon, and later as Lector at the Colegio de Santo Tomas (now U.S.T.) in the Arts. He left for Japan in 1632 with Fr. Domingo de Erquicia. With high spirits and singular apostolic zeal he travelled through several provinces of the Japanese Empire assisting the persecuted Christians, helping the feeble and sick, reconciling the apostates, bringing to all the consoling comfort of the Sacraments. He worked secretly, desired ardently to give his life in the avowal of his faith. He was taken prisoner on September 8, 1634 in Osaka, and brought to Nagasaki, where after repeated efforts of the tyrants to make him renounce his faith to no avail, he was placed in the gallows and pit (ana-tsurushi) on October 18, 1634, where he died the following day. His body was then reduced to ashes.

**6. BRO. MATEO KOHIOYE DEL ROSARIO, O.P. (Dominican laybrother)**

A native of Arima (Kyushu, Japan), he was born in 1615. Since 1632, he was closely associated with Fr. Lucas del Espiritu Santo as his catechist. In 1633 he was taken prisoner in Osaka together with Fr. Jacobo "choosing to die for Christ to living in a world full of miseries". He was brought to Nagasaki, and on refusing to renounce his faith, he was placed in the gallows and pit, where he died the following day.

**7. MAGDALENA DE NAGASAKI, (Dominican Tertiary)**

She was born in Nagasaki around 1610. Her parents were martyred for the Christian faith. Thus orphaned, and imbued with deep Christian faith, she made a vow of perpetual virginity, and busied herself with prayers and alms. When Fr. Jordan de San Esteban, her Spiritual Father, was imprisoned, she presented herself to the Japanese authorities in Nagasaki and offered herself to martyrdom. She was subjected to terrible tortures to make her renounce the Christian faith, which she endured with great fortitude, even the torment of the gallows and the pit where she died on October 15, 1634. Her body was burned to ashes.

**8. FR. JORDAN DE SAN ESTEBAN, O.P. (Dominican priest).**

He was born in San Stefano, Quisquina (Sicily), diocese of Agrigento, (Italy) on November 1, 1589.



Around 1615, he entered the Dominican Order. Desirous of going to Japan to give his life for Christ, he went to Spain, and then to the Philippines where he arrived in 1626. After six years of charitable work among the sick Chinese in Manila, he left for Japan in 1632 with Fr. Jacobo de Santa Maria. Zealous in his work of saving souls, suffering ill health and sickness, and hunted by the authorities, he was taken prisoner on August 4, 1634, and taken to Nagasaki. He was subjected to terrible tortures to make him apostatize, but showed marvelous fortitude and firmness in his avowal of faith. On Nov. 11, he was placed in the gallows and pit where he died after six days on November 17, 1634. His body was reduced to ashes.

**9. TOMAS HIOHI ROKUZAYEMON DE SAN JACINTO, O.P. (Dominican priest).**

He was born in 1590 in the city of Hirado (Japan) of Christian parents. He was educated in Nagasaki, a chaste youth, sober and temperate, dedicating himself to the catechetical apostolate. He went to Manila in 1614, joined the Dominican Order and was ordained priest in 1626. Exemplary in a life of prayer and religious observances, he went back to his native land in 1629 to offer his life in the service of Christians and infidels. He was hunted with singular interest by the tyrants until he was made a prisoner together with Fr. Jordan de San Esteban on July 4, 1634. He was brought to Nagasaki where he was subjected to terrible tortures, but he persevered in being witness to the faith until November 11 when he was given the final torture of the gallows and the pit where he expired after five or six days of agony. His body was burned to ashes.

**10. MARINA OF OMURA, Dominican Tertiary**

She was born in the city of Omura (Kyushu, Japan) in the first decade of the 17th century. Exemplary in

her virtuous Christian life and the hospitality she extended to persecuted missionaries, she received the Dominican habit of the Third Order, in 1625. She was imprisoned for professing the faith, and to test her fidelity to her vows and her virtue, she was made to undergo the humiliating ordeal of walking naked in the streets of the villages of Omura. But as she persisted firmly in her faith, she was sentenced to die by the stake over a slow fire (hoguers) on November 11, 1634. Her ashes were thrown into the sea. The Christians considered her as "the most valiant woman in Japan."

**11. FR. ANTONIO GONZALES, O.P. (Dominican priest)**

He was born in the city and diocese of Leon (Spain) and entered the Dominican Order in the place. Assiduous in prayer and in study, he distinguished himself with his apostolic life and preached in many towns in Spain. Desirous of giving his life for God, he volunteered to go on missions to the Philippines and Japan. He arrived in the Philippines in 1632 and was Professor of Theology in the College of Santo Tomas where he became Rector.

In 1636, he left for Japan with five companions and was arrested on debarking in Okinawa. He was taken to Nagasaki where he was subjected to various tortures after he refused to trample on the images of the Blessed Virgin and some Saints, and to renounce his faith. As a result of the terrible tortures, he died in his cell in the prison in Nagasaki at dawn of September 24, 1637. His body was thrown into the fire and the ashes cast into the sea.

**12. FR. GUILLERMO COURTET (TOMAS DE SANTO DOMINGO) O.P.**

He was born in 1690 in Serignan (Herault, diocese of Montpellier, France). He entered the Dominican Order in 1608. A man of high intellectual and virtuous qualities, he introduced monastic reforms in the Convent of Agianon, as Prior. In 1629, he went to Spain with the object of going on missions to the Orient. In 1635 he arrived in Manila where he became Professor of Theology in the College of Santo Tomas. He became a model of contemplative life, ascetic and pastoral, and lived a life of intense love for God and wished for martyrdom. In 1636 he left for Japan with Fr. Antonio Gonzales and other companions, where they were made prisoners shortly after landing in Okinawa. When brought to Nagasaki, he courageously proclaimed his faith before the Tribunal of tyrants and endured with

fortitude various terrible tortures because he refused to renounce his faith. On September 27, 1637 he was placed in the gallows and pit pulled out after two days, and beheaded on the 29th. His body was reduced to ashes and thrown into the sea.

**13. FR. MIGUEL DE AOZORAGA, O.P. (Dominican priest)**

He was born in Oñate (Guipuzcoa, diocese of San Sebastian, Spain). He entered the Dominican Order in Victoria (Alava, Spain) in 1620, and lived for some years in the Convent of Santo Tomas in Madrid. Desirous of preaching the Gospel in the land of infidels, he arrived in the Philippines in 1635 and exercised the pastoral ministry in the missions in Luzon. In 1637 he left for Japan with Fr. Antonio Gonzales and some companions, and after some time landed in Okinawa where it was not long before they were arrested and brought before the Tribunal in Nagasaki. He avowed his faith with great valor and was subjected to various tortures to test his firmness. Condemned to die on the gallows and the pit, he was hanged head downward in the pit on September 27, 1637, where after two days of extreme agony, he was taken out and beheaded on September 29; his body was consigned to the fire and his ashes thrown into the sea.

**14. FR. VICENTE DE LA CRUZ, O.P., (Dominican priest)**

He was born in Japan of unknown date. Educated in the College of Jesuit Fathers, he devoted his youth to catechetical apostolate. He was expelled from Japan by virtue of the Edict of general persecution and went to the Philippines where he embraced priesthood and became a member of the Third Order of St. Francis in 1620. After many years of pastoral ministry in the Philippines, he decided to go back to Japan to help the persecuted Christians. Before sailing to Japan in 1636 he was admitted into the Third Order of St. Dominic, and together with Fr. Antonio and some companions was arrested in Okinawa shortly after landing there. Terrified by the terrible tortures, he renounced the Christian faith but was taken to prison just the same along with them, encouraged by his companions who had undergone tortures and aided by divine grace, he repented his apostasy and endured the tortures meted out to him. On September 27 he was placed in the gallows and pit, and persevering in his faith, he was taken out two days later, and was beheaded on September 29. His body was thrown into the fire and his ashes cast into the sea.

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## CATHOLIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION

### HOUSE ROSARY CRUSADE

Nuestra Señora de Guia CYO Unit No. 172 in Barangay Rizal, Banga, South Cotabato undertook recently several activities designed to promote its services to the parish and its membership.

During the first General Assembly of CYO units in Banga, South Cotabato, the Unit participated and won in several competitions, among them, 1st prize in folk dancing and 2nd prize in flag raising.

The Unit's officers and members likewise started a house to house rosa-

ry crusade in the barangay. The organization is planning to cover all houses in the barangay and propagate the Marian devotion.

During the fiesta celebration of Barangay Rizal, the Unit sponsored a benefit dance where the candidates for the "Mutya ng Barangay Rizal" were presented. The coronation night proved to be a big boost to the Unit when a member was proclaimed Mutya. The Unit likewise actively joined in the procession, the parade of organizations in the plaza, and in the ball games that were held during the fiesta.

### HOME OF THE AGED VISITED

Officers and members of the Catholic Youth Organization units in Metro Manila visited the Golden Acres Home for the Aged in Quezon City as part of its Christmas celebration. The CYO rendered songs and skits which provided joy and laughter to the elderly residence of the Home. To the tune of Christmas carols, the aging men and women danced and sang. As one of the residents said, "It is not often that we have these celebrations. We are happy that you came to see us."

The residents were given native delicacies prepared by St. Anthony CYO Unit No. 84 in San Antonio Valley, Parañaque.

The affair was coordinated by Bro. Raymundo Caindoy, Bobet de Lara, Joel Magalona, Ermani Cuenco.

### Japan....

*Continuation*

#### 15. LORENZO RUIZ, Layman

He was born in Binondo, (Manila, Philippines) sometime in 1600. His father was a Chinese and his mother, a Filipina. Educated by the Dominican fathers, he served in the convent and church of Binondo. In early manhood he became a member of the Confraternity of the Virgin of the Rosary. He entered into matrimony and had two sons and a daughter. Accused of being involved in a criminal case where the facts were not clear, and fearing to be a victim of injustice, he decided to leave the Philippines together with Fr. Antonio Gonzales and some companions. With them he was arrested sometime after landing in Okinawa and brought to Nagasaki, to be indicted for his Christian faith. Before the Tribunal in Nagasaki, he proclaimed his faith and willingness to give a thousand lives if he had them for God, before renouncing his faith. He was therefore subjected to various tortures and finally condemned to die in the gallows and pit, on September 27, 1637, where he died two days later on September 29. His body was thrown into the fire and his ashes cast into the sea.

#### 16. LAZARO OF KYOTO, Layman

He was born in Kyoto (Honsu, Japan), where he later contracted leprosy. In 1632 he was expelled from Japan for being a Christian and together with hundreds of lepers taken on board a ship that sailed to the Philippines. In 1636, he volunteered to join Fr. Antonio Gonzales and his companions in their mission to Japan, to serve as interpreter and guide. Arrested in Okinawa some time after their landing, they were taken to Nagasaki, where he in a moment of weakness at the inhuman tortures inflicted on them, apostatized. He soon repented of his sin, and became reconciled with God while in prison. He was sentenced to the gallows and the pit on September 27, where he died after two days of torment. His body was consigned to the fire and his ashes thrown into the sea.

#### Summary

These sixteen victims of anti-Christian persecution belong to five nationalities: four Spaniards, nine Japanese, 1 Frenchman, 1 Italian and 1 Filipino. By profession, nine were Dominican priests, two brothers, two Dominican Tertiaris, and three laymen. Only one layman, Lorenzo Ruiz was married and father of a family.