

A New Evangelization Inspired by the Great Kyoto Martyrdom - Stepping Out to Live the Mass in Everyday Life -

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1 The Way of Kyoto Diocese: “Living the Mass in Everyday Life”

Happy New Year!

This year once again, let all of us, the Christians of Kyoto Diocese, join together as the bishop’s motto says “All as one Body” to promote collaborative ministry for mission. For three years since 2004, taking as its theme *Living the Mass in Everyday Life*, the diocese has been working towards forming a unified community for evangelization. Last year, using as a keyword *New Evangelization*, we shared about “a new enthusiasm/new attitude”, “new methods” and “new expressions”.

Recently the decision was made to beatify Father Peter Kibe and 187 other martyrs - something which the Japanese Church has long been waiting and hoping for - and the first ever ceremony of beatification to be held in Japan will take place in Nagasaki in the autumn. Included among these 188 martyrs are the 52 victims of the *Great Kyoto Martyrdom*¹. This year I would like us take as our model the faith of the martyrs who are to be beatified as we step out confidently *Living the Mass in Everyday Life* to realize the *New Evangelization* in Kyoto diocese.

2 Adjustment of Parish Council Codes of Practice all through this Year

Last year saw the end of a three year period designated for working to produce a Parish Council Code of Practice which would direct the management and activities of the parish towards realizing the New Evangelization in a spirit of Collaborative Ministry for Mission. During the year all 56 parishes handed in a provisional Code of Practice and the “Parish Council Code of Practice Adjustment Committee” set about the task of examining them one by one. In fact these 56 Codes of Practice, whilst all based on the diocesan guidelines, showed great ingenuity in devising how to apply the spirit of Collaborative Ministry for Mission in their particular parish, or how to express the working of a parish in which a new system of activity sectors is being introduced. In many of them, however, there are considerable deviations from the diocesan guidelines on the level of detail and some of the expressions used require clarification and so we need a little more time to complete the task of examining the codes you have submitted and adjust them. Because of this, during this year we will continue this work in order to achieve consistency of Codes of Practice in every parish, the blocks and the diocese as a whole. Please continue, then, to use your provisional Code of Practice to choose parish officers and to try to get sector activities up and running.

3 Martyrdom in the Early Days of Japanese Christianity.

The Japanese Church, which sprang from the missionary work of Francis Xavier, almost immediately gave rise to many martyrs, some renowned and some unknown, who are our

ancestors in the faith. Before long this church had to live through a period of savage repression and throughout the whole country produced many martyrs. Amongst these were the *26 Japanese Martyrs* who were canonized in 1862 and *Saint Thomas Nishi and 15 other Martyrs* (one of whom was *Lazaro of Miyako* (Kyoto)) who were canonized in 1987: in all, then, 42 of these martyrs are venerated as Saints. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the canonization of *Lazaro of Miyako*. In addition to these saints another *205 Japanese Martyrs* were beatified in 1867 ².

When Pope John-Paul II visited Japan in 1981, and the Japanese Martyrs were repeatedly being spoken about, the Japanese Bishops' Conference took the opportunity to begin a survey of the Martyrs who were executed after 1603, a period of very severe persecution and torture of Christians. Then in 1984 with the Permission of the Holy See they began the movement for the beatification of Peter Kibe and 187 other martyrs ³. Pope Benedict XVI will promulgate a decree ratifying the beatification of Peter Kibe and 187 other martyrs. Happily, at last, the ceremony of their beatification will be performed at Nagasaki in autumn this year. This is a great grace for the Japanese Church and should be taken as an important opportunity for evangelization. Since the 52 victims of the Great Kyoto Martyrdom are included among the martyrs to be beatified we in Kyoto Diocese in particular should spend this year in special remembrance of them.

4 **Special Characteristics of Peter Kibe and the 187 other Martyrs**

There are several features which characterize this particular group of martyrs. Firstly, the places in which they were martyred are to be found all over the country, in Tohoku, Kanto, Kansai, Chugoku, and Kyushu. Secondly, the group includes people from all walks of life, lay Christians, religious, priests, townspeople, farmers, warriors etc. Thirdly, the martyrs were of all ages, from children to the elderly, of both sexes and included physically handicapped as well as able-bodied people. (From Cardinal Seiichi Shirayanagi's introduction to *Witnesses of Love: Peter Kibe and 187 Martyrs*, published, in 1995, by the Japanese Bishops' Conference Beatification of Martyrs Research Committee.) The following is indicated among the Roman Catholic Church's criteria for raising people to the status of a saint. "First of all they should reflect the Age of the Laity and priority should be given to representative lay people. Furthermore the person should be one who in his own age cared for family, educated children and led a lively faith life." The people to be beatified from the early period of the Japanese Church are for the most part lay people of all ages and both sexes, including children and the elderly, who lived with their families. We of the Japanese Church should be proud to have these martyrs who have no equal anywhere in the world.

5 **The Great Kyoto Martyrdom**

What we call the Great Martyrdom of the early Japanese Christian period refers to the Great Kyoto Martyrdom (October 6, 1619), the Great Nagasaki Martyrdom (September 10, 1622) and the Great Edo Martyrdom (December 4, 1623) in all of which the martyrs were burned at the stake. In Kyoto a group of 52 Christians were martyred, by order of Shogun Hidetada, on the eastern side of the Kamo River between Rokujo and Shichijo (near the front of the present day Great Buddha). The group is noteworthy in that among those who

gave their lives were twelve small children, including infants, and a young mother. The fervent prayers offered for their cause by the Christians of Kyoto Diocese since Bishop Tanaka began the movement to beatify these Kyoto ‘servants of God’ in 1987 have now been heard.

If we who face the challenge of the *New Evangelization* at present bear in mind the witness of the lives and deaths of these martyrs, and etch them into our hearts, this will be a great source of encouragement to all of us who seek to live according to the true faith and to our families. When we speak of saints we tend to think of priests, religious or clerics, but these Kyoto martyrs are a great inspiration for the faith of lay Christians.

6 **John Hashimoto Tahyōe, his Wife Thecla and their Five Children**

First of all I will introduce John Hashimoto Tahyōe and his wife Thecla, their background as Christians, and how they offered themselves, and all their children, to God as a spiritual bouquet. John Hashimoto Tahyōe, whose father was the first lay Christian in Kyoto, was familiar with the faith from his earliest days. Thecla, who was also a native of Kyoto and a Christian from childhood, was her husband’s partner in the faith. When they were martyred the image of them offering their lives along with those of their children became a symbol of the martyrdom of the Japanese Church. (From *The Great Kyoto Martyrdom: October 6, 1619*, Yūki Ryōgo, 1987)

Our vocation is not simply to accept the faith but to bear witness to that faith by “Living the Mass in Everyday Life”. We Christians are given the task of witnessing to the people of the modern world, who are harassed by modern life, that it is precisely the love of God which supports life and is the light which gives us courage and strength to live our everyday lives. Of course we ourselves are people of the modern world who are harassed by life. For this reason our lives as evangelists require great courage and are accompanied by sacrifice (From my 2004 New Year Pastoral Letter, *Living the Mass in Everyday Life*). “I consider the heart of the martyr to be the simplicity of the person who seeks to be faithful to Christ.” (From the preface by Bishop Tanaka Kenichi to *The Great Kyoto Martyrdom: October 6, 1619*, Yūki Ryōgo, 1987)

7 **Martyrdom in Our Own Time**

The word martyrdom means ‘bearing witness to’. What the martyrs bear witness to is not the ‘strength’ of their own faith; they bear witness to the wondrous ‘love of God’. When one’s life is at risk the love of God can appear more clearly. Nowadays in Japan, whatever religion people follow they are not persecuted. For that reason alone, however, even if we have faith it has become difficult to live that faith ‘wholeheartedly’. The vibrancy of the faith of Peter Kibe and the other 187 martyrs has come down through the ages to resonate in our hearts. The lukewarm faith of Christians in our own age is easily undermined; we must not let the martyrdoms in the early Japanese Church become simply some tale from the ancient past.

What about ourselves, once we have received baptism? Usually we are very good at thinking about our own salvation, but to what extent do we think about the salvation of the people around us? Are we not then, by this very fact, risking the loss even of our own faith? Should we not, rather, want to bear witness to our faith? Being baptized is about having

known the love of God and at the same time being given, as a Christian, the mission of showing that love to people who have not known it. In our different lives there are many and varied ways of bearing witness to the love of God but the one thing they all have in common is putting into practice the commandment of Christ that we must believe in the love of God and love one another.

8 Father Peter Kibe and Vocations to the Priesthood

In the bronze statue of Father Peter Kibe in the Memorial Park on the Kunisaki Peninsula in Oita Prefecture he is portrayed with his head held high looking steadily to the front as if inviting the viewer to share his own line of sight. He went to Rome, was ordained priest and returned to Japan during the period of persecution. The eyes of Father Kibe, who led a stormy life which ended with torture and martyrdom, are suffused with the brave spirit which drove him heroically to evangelize. Even though we speak of the age of the laity, the Catholic Church still needs priests who are ready to commit themselves to offering their whole lives to her so as to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and provide all the sacraments. There are four priests among the 188 martyrs to be beatified this year ⁴. All four of them achieved heroic martyrdom after experiencing much turbulence in their lives. Their martyrdom is a great example, encouragement and comfort to the priests of today who everyday persevere in their pastoral and missionary efforts with patience and hope. For a long time, now, Japan has been suffering from a lack of priestly vocations but the beatification of these four priest-martyrs is a timely reminder to the Japanese Church that we need to work hard to encourage priestly vocations. We the priests and people of Kyoto Diocese, which is promoting Collaborative Ministry for Mission, must also pray sincerely to God the Father and make appropriate sacrifices so that He may choose from among us people who will offer their lives to, and spend themselves for, the Church as priests.

9 The Prophetic Role fulfilled by the Martyrs

The Japanese Church today is striving, in the spirit of Vatican II, to spread the Gospel of Christ throughout Japanese Society. Many missionaries from the early period of the Japanese Church looked carefully at the people and culture of Japan and tried on many ways to inculturate the Gospel and give it roots in Japanese soil. In any country and in any age, however, as long as there are elements opposed to the Gospel, the work of announcing the Word of God, which is the truth, never ends. The appeal “Are things alright as they are?” of last year’s meeting of the Catholic Justice and Peace Conference in Kyoto makes us feel strongly the fact that the threat to peace may be the root of all the problems which hover over the world and Japan today, and evokes the responsibility of the Christian as a prophet to ask “Should we simply stand by and do nothing?” The Mass offered together with children, which closed the conference, brought out the fact that, if adults are to live their faith sincerely in today’s Society, and for the sake of the future which our children will inherit, they must declare in the presence of children their decision to fulfill the prophetic mission which Christians must carry out and promise before God to put it into practice.

To achieve the goal of “Living the Mass in Everyday Life” we must recognize that this is bound up with the extent to which our lives are permeated by the Christian’s fundamental determination: we will stand up and fight wherever the dignity of human beings is being

trampled on. (From my 2004 New Year Pastoral Letter). The deaths of Peter Kibe and those other 187 martyrs will give us, who are embarking on a *New Evangelization*, the courage to share in the fundamental determination and struggle of Christ himself.

10 **Let's Advance the Movement for the Beatification of Takayama Ukon**

To highlight the Age of the Laity we need single out for respect lay people in the Church who have done some special work. Especially those people who in the early period of the Japanese Church gave their help to the priests who had come from foreign countries to an unfamiliar world, and who had a great influence on Japanese Society. Justo Takayama Ukon is representative of these people. Each year Kyoto Diocese honors him by holding, in cooperation with the local people, an "Ukon Children's Festival" (Children's Day, May 5) at Haibara in Nara Prefecture where Takayama Ukon spent part of his childhood. Let us, along with the dioceses of Nagoya and Osaka which also have some connection with Takayama Ukon, lend our efforts to the movement for his beatification.

11 **Pray to Mary, Queen of Peace**

Once again this year we offer to God the Father, through the intercession of our Holy Mother Mary, the missionary work of Kyoto Diocese. Let us also, through Mary Queen of Peace, continue to pray for the *Peace of the World*. We have a duty as Christians to think, pray and take action about Peace as a "New Expression" of the *New Evangelization*. We share this obligation with all people of good will who loves peace, no matter what their religion or culture. For the sake of true and everlasting peace which God gives, let us study the truth and pray that we may become evangelizers who announce that truth.

January 1, 2007, Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God

Notes

- 1 Concerning the name “The Great Kyoto Martyrdom”
 At present there stands on the site of the Martyrdom in front of the Kamogawa Great Buddha in Kyoto a memorial stone inscribed with the words, “Site of the Genna Christian Martyrdom”. In fact the Great Kyoto Martyrdom of October 6, 1619 took place during the Genna Period but, since in the history of the Japanese Christian Church the expression “Great Genna Martyrdom” has come to refer to the Great Martyrdom which took place in Nagasaki on September 10, 1622, to avoid confusion with that event, I have used the expression “The Great Kyoto Martyrdom.”
 The other martyrdom included in what are known as “The Three Great Martyrdoms” took place in Tokyo but is not known as the “Great Tokyo Martyrdom”. It is called by the place-name in use at the time: the “Great Edo Martyrdom.” The use of “Kyoto Great Martyrdom” instead of “Miyako Great Martyrdom” is no great inconsistency; from the beginning of the movement to beatify the martyrs the expression “Great Kyoto Martyrdom” has been used. I now formally adopt “Great Kyoto Martyrdom” as the official name

- 2 Calling someone “Blessed” indicates that he is at the stage before he can be called “Saint”. Those people having some connection with Japan for whom the process of beatification is ongoing include Justo Takayama Ukon from the early period of the Japanese Church, and from recent times Father Chimati of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Father Nakamura Chōhachi of Nagasaki Diocese (who died in Brazil) and Father Pedro Arrupe of the Society of Jesus (who died in Rome).

- 3 A Historical Research Committee of the Special Beatification of Martyrs Committee was set up, collection of data on the martyrs carried out and those to be beatified were selected. A Law Drafting Committee was formed and, in the final stage of the Japanese research, the Summoning of Witnesses to Testify under Oath was carried out and the process of determining how well the martyrs could be identified, how greatly they were revered and whether there were any obstacles to their being beatified began. In Kyoto five Christians gave evidence. The collective evidence and a mountain of resource materials were solemnly sealed and sent to the dicastery which deals with the canonization of saints at the Roman Curia so that deliberations could begin.

- 4 Father Julian Nakaura (Nagasaki), Father Diego Yūki Ryōsetsu (Osaka), Father Thomas Kintsuba Jihyōe (Nagasaki) and Father Peter Kibe Kasui (Edo)
 The places of their martyrdoms are indicated in brackets.