
Michael J. Hilden, O.S.A.
Church of Our Mother of Consolation
Nagasaki, Japan

“They go out, they go out, full of tears,
carrying seed for the sowing;
they come back, they come back, full of song,
carrying their sheaves.” (Psalm 26)

The words of this Psalm, used for the Mass of the Augustinians Martyrs of Japan, illustrates the precise conditions under which the Augustinians of the early 17th century sowed the seeds of the Gospel in Japan. A small group of Augustinian friars on their way to China, shipwrecked by a typhoon, found themselves in Nagasaki in February of 1597. They became unexpected eye-witnesses to the crucifixion of the first group of 26 Martyrs on the cliffs of Nishizaka, overlooking Nagasaki harbor. Upon their safe return to the Philippines, they reported to the Augustinian community of Manila that Christianity has been outlawed in Japan. They also reported that the Shogun had cut off the ear lobes and marched a group of 26, including priests and laity (3 teenagers included) from the capital city of Kyoto along a 500 mile journey to the Christian town of Nagasaki to strike fear in the hearts of any who might be so foolish as to embrace the Christian Faith. It was with full knowledge of the Japanese government resolution to destroy the Japanese Church and with a full knowledge of the country's policy of persecution and martyrdom, that the Manila community elected to send its friars to sow the seeds of the faith in Japan. From the beginning of their missionary activities, the Augustinian friars who labored in Japan exhibited the evangelical counsel of comforting the sorrowing Japanese Church and weeping with the Japanese faithful who could never dry their eyes, always moistened by ever recurring torture and martyrdom. These first missionaries, many of whom willingly shed their blood for Christ, lived their baptismal commitment to be daily joined to the crucified and risen Savior. In today's liturgy we turn our ears to their singing with joy and hear anew the victory song of Christ love sung to give us hope and courage. Their witness sheds a prophetic light on present-day Augustinians as we struggle to understand where we ought to be to comfort the sorrowing and distressed brothers and sisters of our world.

When we read the list of these compassionate Blessed Martyrs we are struck by the fact that humble men from many nations joined Japanese faithful to make a truly international Augustinian Family of Martyrs. As part of today's liturgical memorial let us pray that we may become ever more open to creating bonds of cooperation and solidarity with our brothers and sisters throughout our world destined to become one in the love of Christ.

Today, we also remember that the Augustinian martyrs of Japan formed one spiritual family - friars, catechists, secular Augustinians, Confraternity of the Cincture members

- all with different roles to fulfill, but always working united in heart and mind, always supporting each other in prayer and in action. In difficult times, this unity of heart and action brought a community full of tears to a harvest full of song! In different times and in different circumstances, today world learns a joyful melody from the song of the Japanese Martyrs. Alleluia! Alleluia! Those who lose their life for my sake will find it. Alleluia!