

Paul Miki and Companions, Japanese martyrs

St. Paul Miki (d. 1597) was a martyr of Japan, with twenty-five companions. Paul was a member of the noble Miki family, a samurai clan of Harima Province. He was educated by the Jesuits in their missionary seminary and joined the Society of Jesus in 1580, as a Scholastic. Paul, famous as a preacher and evangelist, was arrested by the officials of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the taiko (or commanding general) of Japan. The Miki castle in Harima had been captured by Hideyoshi earlier, while Hideyoshi was consolidating his political power. Paul and his companions were taken to a hill called Nishizaka, just outside of Nagasaki. The hill forms a promontory over Nagasaki Bay. There they were bound to crosses and pierced with two lances in the abdomen. This martyrdom was witnessed by several thousand Japanese pagans and Christians, who were quite horrified.

The companions of Paul Miki were: Francis, a carpenter from Kyoto; Cosmas Takeya, swordmaker from Owari Province; Peter Sukejiro, who had been sent by the Jesuits at Kyoto to aid the prisoners; Michael Kozaki, a bow-maker from Ise Province; James Kisai, Jesuit lay brother from Bizen; Paul Ibachi, aide in the Kyoto Hospital, brother of Leo Ibachi; John Soan de Goto, a Jesuit catechist from Goto Islands; Louis Ibachi, brother of Leo Ibachi; Anthony, son of a Chinese carpenter and a Japanese mother; Pedro Baptista, a Spanish Franciscan superior; Martin de la Asunción, a Spanish Franciscan; Felipe de Jesús, a Mexican Franciscan; Goncalco Garcia; the son of a Portuguese soldier and an Indian mother, a Franciscan; Francisco Blanco, a Spanish Franciscan; Francisco de San Miguel, a Spanish Franciscan; Mathias, a Japanese from Kyoto; Leo Ibachi, from a noble family of Owari; Bonaventure, a former Buddhist monk from Kyoto; Thomas Kozaki, son of Michel

Kozaki; Joachim Sakakibara, a samurai from Osaka who served the Franciscans; Francis Kichi, a doctor from Kyoto; John Kinuya, a carpenter from Kyoto; Gabriel Jusuke, a noble of Ise; and Paul Suzuki, from Owari.

The hill upon which Paul and his companions died is now called “the Hill of the Martyrs.” A stone cross and twenty-six trees stand upon the summit. The martyrs were canonized on Pentecost Sunday 1862 by Blessed Pope Pius IX (r. 1846-1878).

Feast day: February 6