

Fraternité St Pie X – Society of St Pius X

District du/of Canada

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Historia Magistra Vitae I

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

By recalling historic events and persons, especially those who have lived in situation somewhat similar to ours, we learn from them how to live today, we appreciate their exploits, their virtues, and we are led to imitate their virtues.

Few outside Japan will recall that this coming March 17, 2015, will commemorate the 150th anniversary of the discovery of the Hidden Christians, by Fr. Petitjean M.E.P., in Nagasaki. This chapter is very famous in the whole history of the Church and needs to be made known to those who ignore it. I would like to draw your attention, in this letter, on the first of three essential lessons: 1) how to survive, to remain Catholic many years, even many generations, without ever attending a single Holy Mass; 2) how to recognize a true Catholic Priest; 3) the power of the act of contrition.

St Francis Xavier landed in Kagoshima on August 15, 1549 and when he left two years later, he had made about 500 converts. The following 100 years have been called, even in Japanese history text books, “the Christian Century” as a result of the waves of conversions and of the expansion of the Faith, mostly in the South. It is said that over a million Japanese converted during that time. But then, waves of persecutions succeeded one another between 1597 and 1640 A.D. to the extent that by this last date, all the priests had been killed.

Then followed a long ‘crossing of the desert’ which lasted 220 years: no priests, no sacraments, except baptism and matrimony, and constant attacks against the faith in order to quench the smoking flax (cf. Is. 42:3). How did they survived in the practice of the faith? The wise missionaries had well instructed them: each small Christian community had three key persons maintaining the faith alive: a catechist, a baptizer and a calendar-man, who would keep track of the various liturgical feasts.

Imagine teaching catechism to your children and explaining to them the Holy Mass, without ever having seen one, neither you, nor your parents and grand-parents! It was like being back in the Old Testament, awaiting in faith for the glorious day when the Savior would come back in His Eucharistic species. But with the grace of God and the help of Our Lady many, many families kept the faith.

In 1840s, Japan started to open its doors to the outside world. On May 1, 1844, Fr. Forcade M.E.P. (Missions Étrangères de Paris) from his French ship stationed in the harbor of Okinawa, consecrated the Ryukyu Islands (the very South of Japan) to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Then, in 1860, some other M.E.P. Fathers entered the island of Kyushu to see if anything was left of the glorious church of the 16th c., of these 1000s of Christian families.

Fr. Petitjean did make a few converts in Nagasaki, but had not yet found the “Hidden Christians”. His church dedicated to Our Lady was blessed on Dec. 27, 1864, and on the following March 17, 1865, the following events took place:

“Do you pray to Santa Maria sama?” asked Pierre, the brave Japanese, as Fr. Petitjean opened the church to the little group of 15 who had just arrived.

– *Of course, look at her lovely statue over there!*

“Are you with the Pope of Rome? What is his name?”

– *Yes, for sure; it is Pope Pius IX.*

And before leaving the priest, he wanted to be sure that he was truly the successors of missionaries of old.

“Don’t you have any children?” he asked timidly.

– *Don’t you know that true priests don’t marry? Our people are our children.*

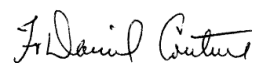
Hearing this, Pierre and his companion bowed down all the way to the ground exclaiming: *“They are virgins! Thank you! Thank you!”*

Later in May, a whole Christian village asked for the visit of the missionaries, and then 600 other Catholics sent a delegation of 20 people to Nagasaki. On June 8, 25 Christian villages (with about 10,000 hidden Christians) had been identified by the missionaries and 7 ‘baptizers’ were put directly in touch with them.

Thus, deprived of all exterior help, without any sacraments except baptism and matrimony; by the grace of God, first of all, and thanks to the faithful transmission, in the families, of the teaching and of the examples of the Christians and Martyrs of the 16th and 17th centuries, the sacred fire of the true faith- or at least a burning spark of it – had been maintained in a country ruled by government tremendously hostile to the Christian religion. The only thing that now remained was to blow on this spark, this smoking flax, to rekindle the flame. (From *Les Missions Catholiques Françaises au XIXe siècle*, by Fr. J.B. Piolet, SJ, (no publishing date but around 1900), vol. III, pp.440-445.)

“Faith of our fathers, we will be true to thee till death!”

Yours truly in the service of Jesus and Mary Immaculate.



Fr. Daniel Couture
District Superior

PS. St Joseph Bursary: Every month, a second collection is taken in all our chapels in Canada to come to the help of families struggling with the cost of the education of their children. Families who would like to benefit from this charitable help are asked to get in touch with Fr. Boulet at: domboulet@gmail.com
We thank everyone for this important act of charity towards our families. In 2014, we were thus able to collect \$55,000 which was then divided between 45 families.