

February 6

St. Paul Miki

1562–1597 • Japan

St. Paul Miki was the son of a Japanese military leader. His family converted to Christianity when he was a child, and Paul was baptized at five years old. He studied under the Jesuit missionaries in Japan and later became a Jesuit himself.

In that time in Japan, there were many political and religious tensions between the Japanese and the Christians that came from Spain and Portugal. The Japanese lord, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ordered the arrest of twenty-six Christians at Kyoto. Paul Miki had just completed his eleven-year training as a novice, and he was one of the twenty-six Christians arrested. The arrested Christians had their ears cut off as a sign of disrespect, and they were paraded through the streets of Kyoto. Paul Miki stood out among the crowd. The onlookers recognized him as the son of the nobleman and remembered that he could even have been a Samurai if he wasn't a Christian. Many in the crowd felt pity for the Christians, and some were even converted by their heroic example.

The twenty-six Christians were then marched over six hundred miles from Kyoto to Nagasaki. They were told that if they gave up their Faith, they would go free. But not one of them rejected Jesus. When they reached Nagasaki, they were crucified high on a hill like Jesus was. Paul Miki gave a final sermon from his cross. He declared that he was Japanese born and that he was being crucified because he was a Christian. Then he forgave his enemies, saying "I obey Christ. After Christ's example I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as a fruitful rain."

The twenty-six Christians sang the Canticle of Zechariah from their crosses, pouring their souls into their music for God. The executioners waited for them to finish the song out of respect and then put them to death by the lance. The eyewitnesses in the crowd were impressed by the faith, patience, strength, and peace with which the martyrs met their deaths.

For the next couple of hundred years, Christianity was forbidden and persecuted in Japan. When missionaries returned to Japan, they could not find any traces of Christianity at first. But to their complete surprise, they discovered thousands of Christians around Nagasaki—where the twenty-six martyrs had died—who had secretly kept the Faith. St. Paul Miki, help me forgive my enemies like Jesus did on the Cross!



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