

Return to Nagasaki

A hardware store in the Motofurukawa section of Nagasaki marks the site of the Church of St. Augustine, founded by Augustinian missionaries in 1606 and continuing as a wellspring of Catholic truth until the end of missionary activity in Japan twenty-nine years later. During the pastorate of Blessed Ferdinand of St. Joseph it served 10,000 worshippers. Here a score of our brethren, including eleven who have been beatified, suffered martyrdom together with thousands of the faithful. After this heroic blaze of charity the curtain of night descended on Augustinian missions in Japan for more than three centuries.

The return of the Augustinians, long desired by Bishop Yamaguchi, was initiated by the late Fr. Provincial Joseph M. Dougherty of the Villanova Province in an early 1952 communication to the late Fr. General Joseph A. Hickey. Fr. Hickey accordingly made representations to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which were answered on June 16, 1952, with the following permission:

Con lettera del 14 corrente, la Paternità Vostra Reverendissima domandava a questo Sacro Dicastero il permesso di poter mandare alcuni Padri di codesto benemerito Ordine della Diocesi di Nagasaki (Giappone).

Al riguardo, mi do premura di significare a Vostra Paternità che questa Sacra Congregazione, attesta la richiesta fatta dall'Ecc.mo Ordinario di Nagasaki, concede ben volentieri, con la presente, il desiderato permesso.

Mentre formulo voti che i buoni Eremitani possano, sulle belle orme dei loro predecessori, compiere in Giappone un felice, fruttuoso apostolado, profitto dell'occasione per rinnovarLe i sensi del mio distinto ossequio, con cui amo raffermarmi

della Paternità Vostra Rev.ma
devotissimo nel Signore
(firm.) P. Card. Fumasoni-Biondi, Pref.

Cello Constantini, Segret.

Thus it came about that three American Augustinians, Fathers George Krupa and Thomas Purcell of the Province of St. Thomas of Villanova and Fr. Edward Robinson of the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, arrived in Nagasaki on November 22, 1952.

The fathers lived for a year at the Yokahama monastery of the Atonement Friars while attending the Far Eastern Institute of Oriental Languages, which is conducted by the Franciscans in Tokyo. It was above all necessary to begin learning Japanese ! Meanwhile the Shiroyama area, rebuilt after total devastation by the Atomic Bomb, was designed as their field of work in Nagasaki. With this end in view the Augustinians purchased from the Marianist Brothers a building and about five acres of land.

Studies in Tokyo were completed on August 1, 1953. On the Feast of Our Holy Founder Bishop Yamaguchi blessed the little Monastery of Our Mother of Consolation in Nagasaki and offered the first Mass. The fathers were not yet ready for official parochial responsibilities ; ahead of them still remained a year of study with a teacher who came daily to the monastery. Their public chapel was convenient for the Catholics of the neighborhood, however, and they soon had good opportunities to preach and hear confessions.

On August 28, 1954, work was begun on a more suitable monastery building and on a hall that was to serve as a temporary church. On All Saints' Day the corner stone of a permanent church edifice was laid. By Christmas the monastery and hall (temporary church) were completed and the Bishop had proclaimed the erection of the new Parish of Shiroyama ; this is a parish with approximately 1300 faithful — mostly from families that kept the Faith through the persecution — and a local mission field of 50,000 pagans. Father Purcell became the first pastor. On May 1, 1955, the new church was dedicated, leaving the hall free for other uses.

The first important provision for the education of the young was the conversion of the hall into a child center and kindergarten with 150 children and four teachers. Later the fathers began construction on the first free Catholic parochial school in Japan. The school is to accomodate, at first, 300 children of the parish. Although the Sisters of St. Maur who are highly regarded as educators in Japan, will provide the teaching staff, the school will be directed

by the Augustinian Fathers and run along the lines of an American parochial school.

Bishop Yamaguchi desired the fathers to concern themselves also with university students. In the fall of 1954 two fathers joined the English Faculty of the venerable University of Nagasaki, thus becoming the first Catholic priests to teach in that institution. After the new monastery was ready the building formerly used for this purpose was made into « St. Mary's Hostel » for university students and placed under the directorship of Fr. Krupa. It is to be noted that the majority of the twenty-two students housed there are pagans.

It is impossible to say how many fathers will one day be needed. The first reinforcements arrived in October, 1954. They were Fathers James Ryan, O. S. A. (Villanova Pr.), and Edward Griffin, O. S. A. (O. L. of Good Counsel Pr.). These fathers went at once to Tokyo to embark on the indispensable study of the Japanese Language.

Thomas PURCELL, O. S. A.

Nagasaki (Japan).