

April 26, 2020-Third Sunday of Easter

Oura Cathedral in Nagasaki

On this day in 2016, the Holy See granted basilica status to the co-Cathedral of Oura in Nagasaki, Japan. It is the oldest wooden Christian Church in Japan.

St. Francis Xavier had brought the faith to Japan in 1549, and within 30 years, there were more than 200,000 converts. But by the late 16th century, Japanese authorities began to expel the missionaries and to persecute Christians. In 1597, 26 Christians were crucified on the city's Nishizaka Hill. But even without churches and priests, Catholic laity covertly passed their faith on to future generations.

In 1865, Japan was reopened for Westerners. A French missionary named Fr. Bernard Petitjean soon arrived to dedicate prayers to the 26 Christians martyred on Nishizaka Hill. He also established a Catholic church, which became the Oura Cathedral.

In 1895, the people decided to build a larger cathedral, which took 30 years to complete. Often called the Urakami Cathedral, it is officially known as the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. On August 9, 1945, the faithful had gathered to prepare for the upcoming Feast of the Assumption. When the nuclear bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, the cathedral was flattened, killing everyone inside. Reconstruction of the cathedral began in 1959. In 1980, it was remodeled to match the original Urakami Cathedral. Inside is the Madonna of Nagasaki, a blackened and damaged statue of the Blessed Mother which survived the bombing.

When the Summer Olympics are held in Tokyo, Japan, this year, they will conclude on August 9, the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki.

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Travel light like the apostles.

In the Gospels, Jesus tells his apostles to travel light.

That's a good idea. Life is too short to be weighed down with excess baggage.

The reason for traveling light isn't because material things are evil. It'd be wrong to think that I'm supposed to tiptoe through the world and avoid the "contamination" of material things. A religion that believes in a God who became flesh and blood cannot have a negative attitude toward material things. A religion that believes in the Resurrection cannot have a negative attitude toward material things. I am not called to have a pious discomfort with material goods. I am called upon to use and enjoy the things of the earth.

Then why travel light? Because accumulating things can get in the way of my relationship with people. Things can be important, but people are always more important.

Things can also bog me down. I was created by God to grow, to move, to journey, to experience the great adventure of life. The more things I pile up, the less I am able to move in this or that direction. I become less and adventurer and more a watchman.

Life is too short to invest too much time and too much talent and too much love in things.

The advice Jesus gives says it all:

go forth to the great adventure of life, and as you go, travel light.

*"Then Jesus called together his twelve apostles and sent them out two by two...He told them, "You may take along a walking stick. But don't carry food or a traveling bag or any money. It's all right to wear sandals, but don't take along a change of clothes."*

-Mark 6:7-13