

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint James Kisai

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: February 6

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IN BRIEF

Saint James Kisai

Japanese catechist and Jesuit brother, one of the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki.

Feast day	February 6
Born	1533, Okayama region, Japan
Died	February 5, 1597, Nagasaki, Japan
Canonized	June 8, 1862, by Pope Pius IX
Era	16th century

In this booklet

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint James Kisai

Saint James Kisai, known in Japanese records as Diego Kisai, was a Japanese catechist and Jesuit brother, born in 1533 and crucified at Nagasaki on February 5, 1597, with twenty-five other Christians. Baptized as an adult, he served the Jesuit mission as a porter and then as a catechist, and he took his religious vows only hours before his death. Canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1862, he is celebrated on February 6 with Saint Paul Miki and his companions.

Who was Saint James Kisai?

James Kisai was the eldest of the three Jesuits among the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki, along with Paul Miki and John de Goto. He was a simple man who had known family life, the failure of his marriage and ordinary work before he found his place in the mission.

His life shows how the Christian faith, brought to Japan by Saint Francis Xavier in 1549, took root among Japanese people of every background, to the point of leading them to martyrdom.



Saint James Kisai, statue in the Church of Saint Martin, Bamberg.

Key dates in the life of Saint James Kisai

- **1533**: Born into a non-Christian family in the region of Okayama, in western Japan.
- **Youth**: He receives his early education in a Buddhist monastery.
- **Adulthood**: He asks for and receives baptism, taking the name Diego, that is, James.
- **1590s**: He enters the service of the Jesuits in Osaka, first as porter, then as catechist.
- **1596**: He is admitted as a novice in the Society of Jesus, to become a coadjutor brother.
- **December 1596**: Arrested in Osaka on the orders of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, together with Paul Miki and John de Goto.

- **January 1597**: The condemned have part of an ear cut off and are paraded through the streets of Kyoto, then led on foot toward Nagasaki.
- **February 5, 1597**: He takes his vows and dies crucified on the hill of Nishizaka, in Nagasaki.
- **1627**: Beatified by Pope Urban VIII.
- **June 8, 1862**: Canonized by Pope Pius IX.

A convert in adulthood

Born in 1533 into a non-Christian family, Kisai was first educated in a Buddhist monastery. As an adult he discovered Christianity and asked for baptism. He married a Christian woman and they had a son.

But his wife returned to her former beliefs, and despite his efforts he could not change her mind. The couple separated. James entrusted his son to a Christian family, so that the boy would be raised in the faith, and went to Osaka to look for work.

Porter and catechist

In Osaka the Jesuits hired him as porter of their residence. It was a humble but essential job: the porter welcomed visitors, the poor and the curious, and was often the first face of the mission.

Because he knew Christian doctrine well, the fathers soon entrusted him with catechesis. He taught the faith to catechumens and the newly baptized, and he looked after guests. Already advanced in years, he asked to enter the Society of Jesus as a coadjutor brother, that is, a religious who is not a priest. He was admitted as a novice in 1596.

Arrest and the march to Nagasaki

In 1587 the regent Toyotomi Hideyoshi had issued an edict expelling the missionaries, which was enforced with varying strictness. In 1596, after the affair of the Spanish ship *San Felipe*, stranded on the coast of Japan, he had Franciscans and other Christians arrested in Kyoto and Osaka.

At the Jesuit residence in Osaka, Paul Miki, John de Goto and James Kisai were arrested. Together with six Franciscans, among them Saint Peter Baptist, and seventeen Japanese lay people, including three young boys, they were condemned to death.

In January 1597 part of their left ear was cut off and they were paraded through the streets of Kyoto, Osaka and Sakai to frighten the population. Then began a march of about a month, in the depth of winter, to Nagasaki, the most Christian city in Japan, where the execution was meant to serve as a warning. On the way, two Christians who were helping them were arrested and added to the group, bringing the number of the condemned to twenty-six.



The Twenty-Six Martyrs Monument on Nishizaka Hill, Nagasaki.

Vows and the cross

Near Nagasaki, a Jesuit priest was able to reach the three members of the Society. He heard their confessions and received the religious vows of John de Goto and James Kisai, who thus became fully Jesuits on the threshold of death.

On February 5, 1597, the twenty-six were bound to crosses raised on the hill of Nishizaka, facing the bay. Witnesses reported that they sang psalms and prayed, and that Paul Miki preached from his cross and forgave his executioners. They were finished off with lances. James Kisai was sixty-four years old.

Cult and memory

The twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki were beatified in 1627 by Pope Urban VIII and canonized on June 8, 1862, by Pope Pius IX. They are celebrated together on February 6 as "Saint Paul Miki and Companions." In 1962 a monument and a museum were opened on Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki.

Who can pray to Saint James Kisai?

Saint James Kisai has no official patronage, but his life makes him a natural intercessor for catechists, for those who receive visitors in parishes and religious houses, for parents separated from their children, for people who come to faith as adults and for late vocations. As one of the martyrs of Japan, he also prays for the Church in Japan and for persecuted Christians.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint James Kisai in art

James Kisai is shown in the black habit of a Jesuit, with the cross and sometimes the lance of his martyrdom. He often appears among the twenty-six martyrs crucified side by side on the hill of Nagasaki.

What can we learn from Saint James Kisai?

James Kisai is the saint of late vocations and humble service. He knew the failure of a marriage, separation from his son and the search for work. He served at the door of a house before he taught the faith. He shows that it is never too late to give oneself to God. You can pray with him using the prayer to Saint James Kisai or the novena to Saint James Kisai, which ends on February 6.

Where to pray to Saint James Kisai

- **Nagasaki** (Japan): the Twenty-Six Martyrs Monument on Nishizaka Hill, the place of his martyrdom.
- **Nagasaki**: the Church of Saint Philip, next to the monument, dedicated to one of the twenty-six martyrs.
- **Bamberg** (Germany): the Church of Saint Martin, a former Jesuit church, where his statue stands.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint James Kisai for Catechists

Saint James Kisai is prayed to mostly together with his companions, the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki, in the liturgy of February 6. The opening prayer of the Mass of Saint Paul Miki and Companions in the Roman Missal asks God, through their intercession, for the grace to hold fast until death to the faith we profess. This page also offers an original prayer by Saintspedia, centered on his own life as a catechist and Jesuit brother.



The martyrdom of the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki, February 5, 1597.

Prayer to Saint James Kisai

Saint James Kisai, you discovered Christ as an adult and received baptism with joy: pray for all who are seeking God, whatever their age, and for those preparing for baptism.

You suffered separation from your wife and your son: comfort divided families, parents far from their children, and all who have known failure in love.

You served at the door of the Jesuit house before you taught the faith: teach us the greatness of humble service, the welcome of visitors and the poor, and the patience to hand on the Word of God.

You offered your life to Christ by your vows, only hours before dying on the cross at Nagasaki: give us the courage to give ourselves completely, without putting it off. Support persecuted Christians and obtain for them the strength to forgive.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). With Saint Paul Miki and all the martyrs of Japan, present it to the Lord. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

Short invocation

Saint James Kisai, faithful catechist and martyr of Christ, pray for us and for all who proclaim the Gospel. Amen.

This invocation is an original text by Saintspedia.

Intentions to entrust to Saint James Kisai

- Catechists and those who prepare adults for baptism.
- Late vocations to religious life or the priesthood.
- People who welcome visitors in parishes and communities.
- Parents separated from their children, and couples in difficulty.
- The Church in Japan and persecuted Christians.

When to pray this prayer

Saint James Kisai is celebrated on February 6, with Saint Paul Miki and their companions, the day after the anniversary of their martyrdom. You can also pray to him at the start of a catechism year or during RCIA (OCIA) sessions. To prepare for his feast, pray the novena to Saint James Kisai from January 29 to February 6, and read the life of Saint James Kisai.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint James Kisai

This novena to Saint James Kisai is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the road of a Japanese man who found Christ as an adult, served as porter and catechist, and gave his life on a cross at Nagasaki at the age of sixty-four. To end on February 6, the feast of Saint Paul Miki and Companions, begin it on January 29. You can also pray it at any time for catechists, late vocations or divided families.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a few quiet minutes. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small act suggested for the day. If you miss a day, simply continue the next one.

You may pray it alone, with your family, or with a group of catechists or RCIA (OCIA) team members. After the prayer of the day, you can name in silence the people you wish to entrust to Saint James Kisai.

James Kisai was not a famous preacher or a scholar. He was an ordinary man who had known disappointment, who worked at a modest job and who kept learning and teaching the faith. This novena invites you to see your own ordinary life, with its wounds and its small services, as a place where God is at work.

Day 1: Searching for truth

James was first educated in a Buddhist monastery. He was a seeker, and his search led him, as an adult, to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for all who sincerely seek the truth. Let them find you. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for a friend or relative who is searching for meaning.

Day 2: Baptized as an adult

He asked for baptism and received the name Diego, James. For him, faith was a free and conscious choice.

Prayer: Lord, bless all adults preparing for baptism this year. Make their faith strong and joyful. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for the catechumens of your parish, or welcome a newcomer at Mass.

Day 3: A wounded family

His wife returned to her former beliefs, and the couple separated. James made sure that his son would be raised in the faith.

Prayer: Lord, comfort divided families and parents separated from their children. Heal what can be healed. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray for a family you know that is going through a separation.

Day 4: Starting again

James went to Osaka to look for work. He had to begin a new life, far from home, with nothing certain.

Prayer: Lord, be with those who are unemployed or must start over. Give them hope and good work. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Help someone looking for a job, with a contact, advice or a prayer.

Day 5: At the door

The Jesuits made him porter of their house. He welcomed visitors, the poor and the curious, and was often the first face of the mission.

Prayer: Lord, make me welcoming. May everyone who comes to my door find kindness. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Greet with special warmth everyone you meet.

Day 6: Teaching the faith

Because he knew the faith well, he became a catechist. He handed on what he had received, patiently, to catechumens and the newly baptized.

Prayer: Lord, bless all catechists, parents and teachers who pass on the faith. Give them patience and joy. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Thank a catechist, or share something of your faith with a child.

Day 7: Never too late

Already advanced in years, James asked to become a Jesuit brother. He was admitted as a novice in 1596.

Prayer: Lord, it is never too late to follow you. Bless late vocations and all who give their lives to you. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Take one step you have been putting off in your life of faith.

Day 8: The long road

Arrested, mutilated and paraded through the streets, he walked for about a month in winter to Nagasaki, with his companions.

Prayer: Lord, support all Christians who suffer for their faith. Walk with them on their way of the cross. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Pray the Stations of the Cross, or pray for persecuted Christians.

Day 9: Vows and the cross

Near Nagasaki, he took his vows as a Jesuit. On February 5, 1597, he died on the cross, praying with his companions.

Prayer: Lord, give me the grace to remain faithful to you until death. Through the intercession of Saint James Kisai, hear the intention I bring you. Saint James Kisai, pray for us. Amen.

Today: Go to Mass if you can, and pray for the Church in Japan.

Closing prayer

> *Saint James Kisai, you found Christ as an adult, served humbly at the door, taught the faith with patience and gave yourself to God completely at the end of your life. With Saint Paul Miki and all the martyrs of Japan, pray for catechists, for those who seek God, for divided families and for persecuted Christians. Obtain for me a faithful and generous heart. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This novena is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

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