

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Paul Miki

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 6

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IN BRIEF

Saint Paul Miki

Japanese Jesuit and preacher, crucified at Nagasaki in 1597 with twenty-five companions.

Feast day	February 6
Born	c. 1564, Japan
Died	February 5, 1597, Nagasaki, Japan
Canonized	June 8, 1862, by Pope Pius IX
Era	16th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Paul Miki for Courage and Forgiveness

Novena to Saint Paul Miki

Monument to the Twenty-Six Martyrs, Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Paul Miki

Saint Paul Miki was a sixteenth-century Japanese Jesuit, crucified at Nagasaki on February 5, 1597, together with twenty-five other Christians. The son of a military commander and baptized as a child, he became a renowned preacher among the samurai before he had even been ordained a priest. Arrested in Osaka when he might have been spared, he preached from the cross itself and forgave his executioners. Canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1862, he is celebrated on February 6 at the head of the martyrs of Japan.

Who was Saint Paul Miki?

Paul Miki was born around 1564 into a family of warriors. His father was a captain in the service of Oda Nobunaga, the lord who was then working to reunify Japan. Christianity, brought by Saint Francis Xavier in 1549, was growing quickly at the time, especially in some families of the military aristocracy. Paul was baptized with his parents at about the age of five.

In 1580 his father sent him to study at the minor seminary founded by the Jesuits and directed by the Italian missionary Organtino Gnecchi-Soldo. Driven out by the wars of the period, the seminary had to move several times, notably to Takatsuki. There Paul received a formation that was both Christian and Japanese, in keeping with the Jesuits' wish to train a local clergy.



Saint Paul Miki, statue in the Church of Saint Martin, Bamberg.

Key dates in the life of Saint Paul Miki

- **c. 1564**: Born into a samurai family.
- **c. 1569**: Baptized with his parents.
- **1580**: Enters the Jesuit minor seminary.
- **August 1586**: Enters the novitiate of the Society of Jesus, at twenty-two.
- **1587**: Toyotomi Hideyoshi orders the expulsion of missionaries, without enforcing it at once.
- **1588**: First religious vows, followed by studies at Amakusa and Nagasaki.
- **1592**: Accompanies the Jesuit superior Pedro Gómez to the residence in Osaka.
- **December 9, 1596**: Arrested in Osaka with the Jesuits of the house.
- **January 1597**: The condemned are paraded in Kyoto, then marched on foot to Nagasaki.

- **February 5, 1597**: Crucified on Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki.
- **1627**: Beatified by Pope Urban VIII.
- **June 8, 1862**: Canonized by Pope Pius IX.

A Japanese preacher for the Japanese

In August 1586 Paul entered the Jesuit novitiate. He made his first vows in 1588 and continued his studies at Amakusa and Nagasaki. Latin, required for the priesthood, gave him great difficulty, and he had not yet been ordained when he died. He excelled, however, in catechesis and preaching. His superiors often sent him to debate with Buddhists and non-Christian scholars, because he knew their teachings well and could speak their intellectual language.

In 1592 he became a co-worker of Pedro Gómez, superior of the Jesuits in Japan, and settled in Osaka. Generous and outgoing, he had a particular gift for reaching the samurai, whose background he shared. He embodied what the missionaries hoped for: a Christian Japan evangelized by the Japanese themselves.

The choice to stay with his brothers

In 1587 Toyotomi Hideyoshi, now master of the country, ordered the expulsion of the missionaries, but the edict remained almost a dead letter. In 1596 the affair of a stranded Spanish ship, the *San Felipe*, revived his suspicion of Europeans. On December 9, 1596, the religious of the Jesuit house in Osaka were arrested. Paul Miki, being Japanese, might have been spared. He asked to share the fate of the others.

The prisoners were gathered with Franciscans and lay people from Kyoto. According to accounts of the time, part of their left ear was cut off, and they were paraded through the streets of Kyoto before being forced to walk, in the

middle of winter, hundreds of miles to Nagasaki. All along the way Paul Miki preached to the crowds and encouraged his companions. On February 5, 1597, a few hours before his death, he renewed his Jesuit vows.



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

The sermon from the cross

On Nishizaka Hill, facing the sea, the twenty-six condemned were bound to crosses. The contemporary account of their martyrdom, an extract of which the Church reads on their feast day, relates that Paul Miki preached one last time from his cross. He declared that he was Japanese and a member of the Society of Jesus, that he was dying for having preached the Gospel, and that he forgave Hideyoshi and all who had sought his death. The condemned were then pierced with lances.

News of their death spread through Japan and Europe. Remarkably, Pope Urban VIII beatified them as early as 1627, while the persecution was still raging. Japanese Christians would live in hiding for more than two centuries. Pope Pius IX canonized the martyrs of 1597 on June 8, 1862, shortly before Japan reopened to missionaries. Their story is told in full on the page of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan.

What is Saint Paul Miki invoked for?

Saint Paul Miki shows that one can belong fully to one's people and fully to Christ: on the cross he claimed both his Japanese identity and his faith. His holiness also rests on a free choice, that of not seeking safety when his brothers were arrested. And his last sermon was an act of forgiveness. He is prayed to for the Church in Japan and in Asia, for persecuted Christians, for catechists, and for all who must bear witness to their faith in a hostile setting.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Paul Miki and the novena to Saint Paul Miki, from January 28 to February 5.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Paul Miki in art

He is shown in the black cassock of a Jesuit, often bound to a cross or holding one, sometimes with a lance or a palm, the sign of martyrdom. In many images he stands with his companions in a row of crosses overlooking the bay of Nagasaki, as on the bronze monument of Nishizaka.



Oura Church in Nagasaki, dedicated to the twenty-six martyrs.

Where to pray to Saint Paul Miki

- **Nagasaki, Nishizaka Hill**: the Twenty-Six Martyrs Monument and Museum, built on the site of the crucifixion.
- **Nagasaki, Oura**: Oura Church, a basilica dedicated to the Twenty-Six Holy Martyrs of Japan.
- **Kyoto and Osaka**: the cities where he preached and was arrested, starting point of the martyrs' march.

PRAYER

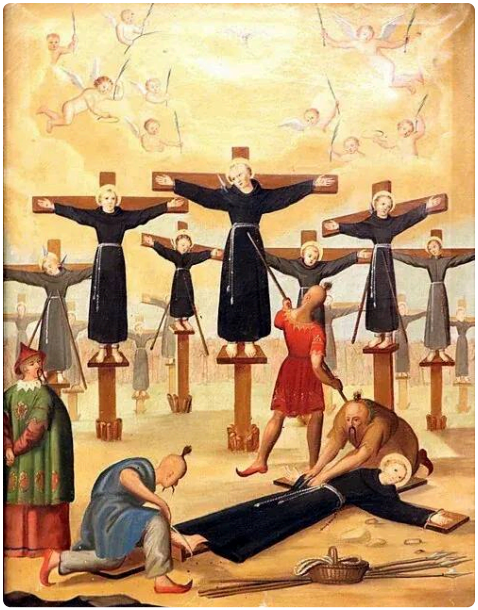
Prayer to Saint Paul Miki for Courage and Forgiveness

Saint Paul Miki left no writings, but the contemporary account of his martyrdom preserved the heart of his last sermon, preached from the cross. Below you will find a passage from that testimony, followed by an original prayer to Saint Paul Miki centered on his courage as a preacher and on forgiveness.

Words of Paul Miki to meditate on

> *"I am a Japanese by birth and a brother of the Society of Jesus. [...] I gladly forgive the ruler and all who have caused my death, and I pray God that they may receive baptism."*

Source: contemporary account of the martyrdom at Nagasaki (1597), an extract of which is read in the Liturgy of the Hours on February 6, the memorial of Saint Paul Miki and Companions (free and abridged translation).



Saint Paul Miki praying on the cross.

Prayer to Saint Paul Miki for courage and forgiveness

Saint Paul Miki, you refused to be spared when your brothers were arrested. Give me the courage not to abandon those who suffer for their faith.

You proclaimed Christ in your own language and in the spirit of your people. Help me to speak of the Gospel in simple words that others can hear.

You preached all along the road from Kyoto to Nagasaki, in spite of cold, weariness and humiliation. Teach me to remain a witness even when all seems lost.

You forgave from the height of your cross. Heal the resentment in me and make me able to pray for those who hurt me.

I entrust to you the Church in Japan and in Asia, catechists, and my own intention: (name it in silence). Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Paul Miki is celebrated on February 6 with his companions, the day after the anniversary of their crucifixion on February 5, 1597. You can pray to him throughout the year for persecuted Christians, for the missions, for catechists and for the gift of forgiveness. It is also a good prayer before a conversation in which you will need courage to speak about your faith.

Praying with all the martyrs of Japan

Paul Miki did not die alone. You can extend this prayer by remembering his twenty-five companions, Jesuits, Franciscans and Japanese lay people, including three boys who served Mass. Read their story on the page of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Paul Miki, and read the life of Saint Paul Miki.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Paul Miki

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and martyrdom of Saint Paul Miki. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast on February 6, begin on January 28; it ends on February 5, the anniversary of his death. It can also be prayed at any time of year for persecuted Christians or for someone who needs the grace to forgive.

Who was Saint Paul Miki?

Born around 1564 into a samurai family and baptized as a child, Paul Miki became a Jesuit and a gifted preacher who knew how to speak to his own people. Arrested in Osaka in December 1596, he refused to be spared and walked with his companions all the way to Nagasaki. Crucified on Nishizaka Hill on February 5, 1597, he preached a last sermon from the cross and forgave his executioners. These nine days follow the stages of his life and death, from the grace of baptism to the forgiveness he offered at the end.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into your day. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off. The novena can be prayed alone, as a family, or with a parish or youth group.



Saint Paul Miki, church stained glass window.

Day 1: The gift of baptism

Paul was baptized as a child, with his parents, in a Japan where the Christian faith was still new. That baptism, received in a family of warriors, would make him a soldier of another kind.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for my baptism. Through the intercession of Saint Paul Miki, help me to live from the grace I have received. Amen.

Today: Find the date of your baptism and thank God for it.

Day 2: Learning with patience

Latin defeated him, and he never reached the priesthood. He did not lose heart, and he served where he was gifted: in catechesis and preaching. God does not ask us to have every talent, only to give the ones we have.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to accept my limits and to give generously what I have. Amen.

Today: Put one of your talents at the service of another person.

Day 3: Dialogue with respect

His superiors sent him to debate with Buddhist scholars. He knew their thought and spoke to them intelligently. We can only proclaim the Gospel well to those we have first tried to understand.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, help me truly to listen to those who do not share my faith. Amen.

Today: Learn something about the religion or culture of someone around you.

Day 4: Staying with his brothers

As a Japanese, he might have escaped arrest. He chose to go with the others. Faithfulness is proved in the moments when it would be easy to slip away.

Prayer: Lord, do not let me abandon those who count on me. Amen.

Today: Support someone going through a hard time with a call or a visit.

Day 5: Bearing humiliation

In Kyoto the condemned were mutilated and paraded through the streets. They did not answer with hatred. Christ too was mocked before his cross.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, humiliated for our sake, keep me gentle when I am mocked. Amen.

Today: Let an unfair remark or criticism pass without returning it.

Day 6: Preaching on the road

On the long march to Nagasaki, he never stopped proclaiming Christ to the crowds. The ordeal became a mission.

Prayer: Lord, make my trials an occasion to make you known. Amen.

Today: Speak simply about your faith to someone who asks a question.

Day 7: Renewing his commitment

On the morning of his death, he renewed his Jesuit vows. At the moment of losing everything, he said his yes once more.

Prayer: Lord, today I renew my desire to follow you wherever you lead. Amen.

Today: Reread and renew a promise you have made to God or to someone you love.

Day 8: Japanese and Christian

On the cross, he declared himself Japanese and a member of the Society of Jesus. He did not set his people against his faith. The Gospel takes flesh in every culture.

Prayer: Lord, bless the Churches of Asia and all the peoples who welcome your Word. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Christians of a country where they are a small minority.

Day 9: Forgiving from the cross

His last words were a pardon for those putting him to death, and a prayer that they might receive baptism. The martyr does not curse; he blesses.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Paul Miki, give me a heart that forgives. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for a person who has hurt you.

Closing prayer

Saint Paul Miki, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for the Church in Japan, for persecuted Christians, and for me. Obtain for me the courage to bear witness and the grace to forgive. With all the holy martyrs of Nagasaki, intercede for us before the Lord. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Paul Miki, the story of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan, and the prayer to Saint Paul Miki.

PILGRIMAGE

Monument to the Twenty-Six Martyrs, Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki

Nishizaka Hill, in Nagasaki, is the place where Saint Paul Miki and his twenty-five companions were crucified on February 5, 1597. A large monument and a museum dedicated to the twenty-six martyrs have stood there since 1962, a few minutes' walk from Nagasaki Station. It is the main pilgrimage site connected with Saint Paul Miki and one of the high places of Christian memory in Japan.

A hill facing the sea

In 1597, Nishizaka was a height set apart from the town, facing Nagasaki Bay. The authorities had twenty-six crosses set up there in a row. The choice of Nagasaki was no accident: the city was then the main Christian center in Japan. In the persecutions that followed, other Christians were executed in the area, so that the hill became the symbol of all the Japanese martyrs.

In 1962, for the centenary of the canonization of the martyrs of 1597, a monument was unveiled on the hill. Its bronze wall shows the twenty-six martyrs standing side by side, hands joined or raised, as if climbing toward heaven. A neighboring museum traces the history of Christianity in Japan, from the arrival of Saint Francis Xavier in 1549 to the long period of the Hidden Christians. A church dedicated to Saint Philip of Jesus, one of the martyrs, stands nearby.



The Monument to the Twenty-Six Martyrs, Nishizaka Hill.

Visiting the monument and museum

The monument is visited in the open air, on the esplanade of the hill. Visitors can spot the statue of Paul Miki among those of his companions: Franciscan priests and brothers, catechists, laypeople, and the three young boys who served Mass. The museum displays documents, objects from the mission era and testimonies of the faith kept in secret for more than two centuries.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Paul Miki and the story of the twenty-six martyrs of Japan. In front of the monument, take a moment to pray for Christians persecuted today, then say the prayer to Saint Paul Miki. If you come in early February, you can finish the novena to Saint Paul Miki there. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Paul Miki

- **Nagasaki, Oura**: Oura Church, built in 1864 and dedicated to the Twenty-Six Holy Martyrs of Japan; it was here in 1865 that Hidden Christians revealed themselves to a missionary.
- **Osaka**: the city where he worked with the Jesuit superior and where he was arrested in December 1596.
- **Kyoto**: the city where the condemned were put on display before the march to Nagasaki.

Practical information

Nishizaka Hill is very close to JR Nagasaki Station. The monument esplanade is open to all; the museum has its own hours and admission conditions, published on its official website. On February 5 and 6, celebrations may gather many worshippers: check with the Archdiocese of Nagasaki.

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