



## **Marian Prayer – 21 May Our Lady of Nagasaki Japan For social workers.**

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Good afternoon to all. Special thanks to Maria Grazia Tibaldi for inviting me to participate in this webinar. My name is Maria De Giorgi. I am a Missionary of Mary Xaverian. I have been living and working in Japan since 1985 and, since 1987, I have been serving as a missionary at the Shinmeizan ("Mountain of True Life") Centre for Spirituality and Interreligious Dialogue, founded in 1987 by my Xaverian brother Fr Franco Sottocornola, in Nagomi, Kumamoto Prefecture.

As a centre for spirituality and dialogue, we are open to all those who wish to spend a moment of research, prayer and discussion. We try to promote dialogue in its various dimensions: life, works, theological exchanges and religious experience. Since 1993, every two years, we also organise a prayer meeting for peace in which our closest dialogue partners in the area participate. Every month we also hold a day of retreat open to all, attended by Christians but also people in search, some of whom have even been baptised.

I know, however, that your connection with Japan today was born out of a desire to be in tune with the Marian prayer celebrated in Nagasaki to ask for an end to the pandemic. This is why I would like to talk about the presence of the Virgin Mary in the life of Christianity in Japan.

Shinmeizan is located on a hill surrounded by dense forests, from which there is a wide panorama. To the west, beyond the Ariake arm of the sea, we can see the Shimabara Peninsula, dominated by the Unzen volcano, which belongs to Nagasaki Prefecture, with which we border.

Nagasaki is the city known throughout the world for the atomic bomb, but also for the painful events of the first Christian expansion in Japan, which began with the landing of St Francis Xavier at Kagoshima on 15 August 1549, the feast of the Assumption of Mary, and then continued in a climate of restrictions and persecutions that lasted for centuries.

The Rosary prayed today in Nagasaki, in St Mary's Cathedral, is part of this history. The early Christians of the 16th and 17th centuries venerated and invoked Our Lady as St Mary. With this same name - thanks to a happy stratagem - they continued to address her during the persecutions, using the statuette of the Kannon Sama, a Buddhist female figure, symbol of mercy, represented as a mother holding her little son, on which they engraved, behind or under the statue, a small cross. These statuettes were called Maria Kannon. Here you can see an example. This is the Maria Kannon that we have in Shinmeizan.

Then in the 19th century, although the proscription of Christianity was still in progress, some foreign powers were allowed to have pied-à-terres for commercial purposes. In 1873, a French missionary who lived in Yokohama, near present-day Tokyo, managed to go to Kyoto, where - at the request of another French priest who had started a prayer group in France for evangelisation to resume in Japan and for the dream of St Francis Xavier to be realised. Francis Xavier's dream of dedicating a church to Our Lady in Kyoto would be realised - he buried a small statue of Our Lady on a hill overlooking the city of Kyoto, as a pledge and a hope that Japan would reopen its doors to the proclamation of the Gospel. A few years later, in 1879, the statue was unearthed and on 1 May 1890 it was placed in the Kawaramachi Church where the Kyoto Cathedral now stands, in whose crypt the statue is still venerated today as *Our Lady of Kyoto*!

Another decisive event for the Christians in Japan took place in Nagasaki on 17th March 1865. The French missionary Bernard Petitjean, of the Foreign Missions in Paris, was able to build a church on a hill in Nagasaki that had been granted to France for trade reasons. One morning some Christians came to him - descendants of the so-called "hidden Christians" who had lived "in the catacombs" for over 200 years due to persecution - to verify the missionary was a Catholic priest and reveal their faith to him. It was the statue of Our Lady and the common devotion to her that sealed the mutual recognition between Father Petitjean and those "hidden Christians". In Japan, every year, on 17th March, the Feast of Our Lady of the Discovery of the Hidden Christians is celebrated!

On 9 August 1945, the atomic bomb destroyed, along with most of the city of Nagasaki, the Cathedral and the statue of Our Lady that dominated its façade. The head of this statue, which was found deformed by the atomic radiation, is now venerated in a special chapel of St Mary's Cathedral in Nagasaki, where the rite of the Rosary has been held today.

It is in this Marian history of Japan that today's prayer of intercession is inserted to ask for an end to the pandemic! Our Lady, who experienced with the ancient martyrs and the recent victims of the atomic bomb the tragic sufferings of those events; who over the centuries has accompanied the history of Japan in a maternal way; who always shares as Mother the sufferings of her children, may now intercede for the victims of the pandemic; may she support, in a special way, all the health care workers who with dedication and sacrifice care for those affected by this disease.

Holy Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church,  
honoured and invoked by the many martyrs of Nagasaki and of all Japan,  
you were the "sign" for the rediscovery of the "hidden Christians"  
who for centuries preserved the faith during the persecutions in this country,  
and, on the hills of Kyoto, hidden, you prepared the return  
of the preaching of the Gospel in this Land of the Rising Sun.  
Your statue adorning the ancient cathedral church of Nagasaki  
was destroyed by the atomic bomb that sowed death and devastation there  
on the sad day of 9 August 1945.  
We now lovingly preserve the head deformed by the atomic flames.  
Today, from this city of Nagasaki, we pray to you  
for the whole world desolated by a devastating pandemic

which claims many victims, breaks down and obstructs communication,  
prevents work and social life,  
threatens the just and peaceful progress of peoples.

We entrust to you in a special way the health care workers who,  
like the Good Samaritan, bend over the wounds of so many suffering brothers and sisters.

Turn your Motherly eyes upon us,  
intercede for us with your Son Jesus and obtain from his mercy  
for all of us who invoke you today, and for the whole world,  
an end to this insidious disease,  
a renewed fervour of faith, a bolder hope  
and the comfort of feeling that we are all brothers. Hail Mary...