

OUR LADY AND THE JAPANESE MARTYRS: 150TH ANNIVERSARY

WHEN THAT DAY COMES A FOUNTAIN WILL BE OPENED FOR THE HOUSE OF DAVID AND THE CITIZENS OF JERUSALEM said the 1stR. Today we thank God for 150 years of the consecration of this church dedicated to Our Lady and the Japanese Martyrs. Anniversaries are times to look back and give thanks. We thank God today for all we've received in this holy house: the baptisms, confirmations and First HCs, the marriages and funerals, the parish priests and parishioners we've known and loved. For most of its life, after Pere Guiramond and Pere Tardivon, the parish was looked after by French OMI priests until under Fr. Brian Cousins diocesan clergy took over in 1998. We thank them and pray for them. But this church, whose 150th anniversary we celebrate, has been for St. Martin's, the house of God. For here in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus Christ has laid down his life for many generations of parishioners that they might receive from him the gift of eternal life and happiness.

The Martyrs of Japan, to whom church is dedicated were canonised, at the time of its foundation. The history of the Church in Japan is fascinating. Catholicism reached Japan in 16C and made headway, but then the political climate changed and later emperors rejected Western influences. Persecution followed and St. Paul Miki and his companions, priests and laity, were crucified. But in 19C, the wind changed and the Church was allowed back in. The story is told of a French Dominican sitting outside his newly built church saying the breviary, when some country folk came up to him out of the woods and asked: "Are you the same religion as us? We've been looking around your temple, and we've seen the statue of a young woman with a baby. In our religion, we call that woman: Maria." They were Catholics! It's amazing that for several centuries the faith was passed on in prayer and catechesis in families, with no priests and no churches, just one sacrament, Baptism. It's a story that bears out the truth of the ancient saying: THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS IS THE SEED OF THE CHURCH.

But anniversaries are not just times to look back. In the Gospel Jesus said: IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE A FOLLOWER OF MINE, LET HIM RENOUNCE HIMSELF, TAKE UP HIS CROSS EVERY DAY AND FOLLOW ME. By dying on the Cross, Jesus has made a way for us through death, and by rising, opened the gates of heaven. In choosing to redeem us in this way, he shews us what love truly is, self-sacrifice. This is a message we must proclaim to our secular culture today. One of the things I like to do in the evening in Portsmouth is to go out for a walk saying the Rosary. I like the changing scene, but the lights of the city are so bright, you can rarely see the stars. Our secular culture is a bit like that: busy, bright, absorbing; it blocks out God and the sacred canopy of heaven, like fog obscuring our eternal destiny, making us lose our way. This is why I urge you to visit this church often, to come here and pray to Jesus in the

Blessed Sacrament, to learn from him, the Way of true love, and to receive from Him the strength to put it into action.

FOR YOU MY SOUL IS THIRSTING, O GOD MY GOD. In this Mass, those words of the Psalm are ours. As we thank God today and pray for all the people we've known and loved here, living and dead, let's also ask Our Lady and the Martyrs of Japan to pray for us and for all who belong to this community now and in the years to come. May God renew the Church here in Jersey and bring everyone in St. Martin's to know, love and serve Jesus Christ and one day reach eternal life.