



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with members of the “Hidden Christian Research Association”, Japan

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Hidden Christian Research Association”, Japan, on the occasion of their pilgrimage to Rome.

The following is the Holy Father’s greeting to those present:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican on the occasion of your pilgrimage in the wake of the 2018 inscription of the Hidden Christian sites in the Nagasaki region on the World Heritage List. I very much appreciate your efforts to preserve these sites as a precious witness to a great but hidden chapter in the history of the universal Church and in the history of your noble people. And this is something that I want to emphasize: the Japanese people are a noble people. It is my hope that this recognition of the importance of these sites will not only ensure their proper conservation but also serve as a living testimony to the fidelity of so many Japanese Christians who passed on the precious treasure of the faith as a legacy from generation to generation. And I will have the joy of creating another Japanese Cardinal on 7 December.

It is fitting that our meeting takes place on the eve of the Church’s celebration of the Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, the great missionary who dreamed that the preaching of the Gospel would bring forth a rich harvest of souls in your native land. As heirs to that dream, may your work of education and conservation make better known and appreciated this eminent chapter in the history of evangelization. May the visit to these historical sites serve for Christ’s followers in Japan today as “a living memory, an inspiration for the works of the apostolate and a spur to renewed evangelization” in your land” (cf. *Address at the Martyrs’ Monument*, Nishizaka Hill, 24 November 2019).

Dear friends, when we think of the heroism of the early missionaries, the courage of the Japanese Martyrs and

the perseverance of your country's small but faithful Catholic community down the centuries, how can we not think of our fellow Christians who in our own day are enduring persecution and even death for the name of Jesus? I ask you to join me in praying for them, and for all those who suffer the bitter fruits of war, violence, hatred and oppression. Let us commend ourselves to the intercession of Our Lady, Mother of the Church, and pray ever more fervently for the coming of Christ's kingdom of universal reconciliation, justice and peace.

With affection I give you my blessing and assure you of my prayers. And I trust that you will pray for me.
