

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR IN JAPAN.

THE Rev. Father Sheahan, writing in the *New York Sun*, says: The first martyr who shed his blood for Christ in Japan was one of the much-vilified Filipino friars, and also a native of North America. Those who have visited Mexico lately have doubtless seen the beautiful Church of St. Philip, built in his honor, which was opened on February 5, 1897, the third centenary of his martyrdom. All the priests of the United States, on February 5, by the Mass and the divine office of St. Philip of Jesus, as he is called. A short sketch of his life is given in the *Roman Breviary* and a more extended account in the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* for August.

On the baptismal font in the Cathedral of the City of Mexico is the following inscription:

'In this font was baptized the glorious Japanese martyr, St. Philip of Jesus, a native of this City of Mexico, and its patron.'

Felipe las Casas was born in 1672. His early life was not edifying. Many were the tears and prayers of his mother for his conversion. Hoping that he would do better if he were removed from his evil companions, his father sent him to Manila, where he had large commercial interests, but his life in the Philippines was no better than it had been in Mexico. He squandered his fortune, almost ruined his health, and found himself in as desperate straits as was the prodigal of the Gospel. Then like another Augustine he gave up his wicked life, turned to God and resolved to serve Him with his whole heart and soul for the rest of his life, and he did. He became a Franciscan friar, entering their convent in the city of Manila, and by word and example he encouraged all he came in contact with to be true followers of Jesus Christ.

After an absence of several years, he left Cavite to visit Mexico to see his parents, but the sailing vessel had to stop at the Japanese port of Uraido for repairs. The arrival of himself and some fellow friars was interpreted as an attempt of the missionaries to prepare Japan for future subjugation by Spain. It served the Emperor Taicosama with a pretext for ordering the execution of the Franciscan friars at Ozuca and Meaco. The tips of the ears of the missionaries were cut off and they were started on their journey, lasting a month, to the place of execution. When they reached the hill where they were to die and saw the 26 crosses prepared for them and the executioners with their spears and iron bands, and the crowds of Japanese waiting for the execution, the martyrs astonished the pagans by a tremendous shout of joy. Philip could be heard above the rest, as he stretched out his hand toward the cross on which he was to die, and cried:

'Hail! precious cross, on which the Redeemer of the world died for me; O blessed seafaring, O fortunate vessel, whose shipwreck has been for me the cause of such great gain!'

One of the iron bands with which Philip was fastened to his cross became displaced, caught him about the neck, and he was slowly strangled, murmuring all the while as well as he could 'Jesus, Jesus.' One of the executioners put an end to his sufferings by driving a spear through his body, thus giving him the martyr's crown ahead of his 25 companions.

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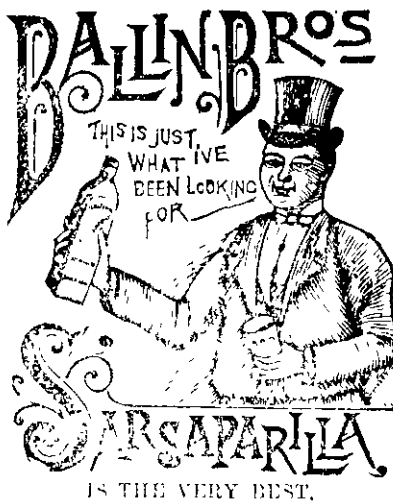
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