

Nakaura Julian Statue

Nakaura Julian was born in 1567 into a Christian samurai family and attended a Jesuit seminary in Arima. His life as a Christian took a glorious turn when, at the age of 15, he was selected as one of four young men to be sent to Rome as part of the Tensho Embassy. Having set out in 1582, Nakaura was to meet Pope Gregory XIII, Pope Sixtus V, and King Philip II of Spain, among others, before returning to Japan in 1590.

With Toyotomi Hideyoshi's 1587 edict expelling the Christian fathers, Japan had become less hospitable to Christianity during Nakaura's eight-year absence. Nakaura was ordained as a priest in 1608, and opted to stay in Japan even after the shogunate's 1614 edict banning Christianity prompted many other priests, both foreign and Japanese, to flee the country. He took his activities underground, ministering to the faithful in secret.

In late 1632, Nakaura, who was well into his sixties by this time, was captured by the Tokugawa shogunate. After many months in prison, he was put to the torture of the pit on October 18, 1633, and died on the fourth day, October 21. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 as part of a group of 188 Japanese martyrs.