

Monument of the Coming Ashore of the 26 Martyrs

When the Spanish ship *San Felipe* was wrecked just off Shikoku in October 1596, the captain, in an indiscreet moment, told the Japanese authorities that the Spanish had conquered overseas territories by first sending in the missionaries and then sending in the conquistadores. The response of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Japan's de facto ruler, was as harsh as it was swift. He ordered the arrest of foreign priests and brothers.

Twenty-four of the twenty-six martyrs had been captured in Kyoto and Sakai, south of Osaka. Their ears were cropped and they were made to walk, barefoot and dressed in rags, for around 1,000 kilometers in the depths of winter. Over the course of the journey, another two Catholics were added to their number, bringing the total to 26.

They arrived in Togitsu late at night on February 4, 1597, having crossed Omura Bay by boat from Sonogi. Early the next morning, they walked the last 12 kilometers to Nagasaki along the Urakami Kaido. When they reached Nishizaka, a hill overlooking Nagasaki, they were tied to crosses and then stabbed with spears. In the Edo period (1603–1868), the place where they died was referred to as *bateren fujochi* (“the unclean place of the foreign priests”).