

# Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 17: PAINTING OF THE JAPANESE MARTYRS

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The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America—better known as Maryknoll—has served in Seattle for nearly 100 years.

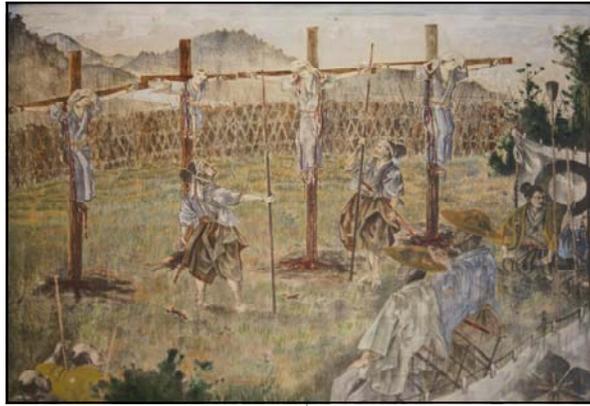
Maryknoll was the vision of two diocesan priests, Father James Anthony Walsh of Boston and Father Thomas Frederick Price of Wilmington, North Carolina, who met at a Eucharistic Congress in Montreal in 1910. The two men came together in a shared vision to prepare priests for missionary work overseas. The concept was more radical than it sounds, since at that time, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, the United States was itself a mission territory. Walsh and Price felt that it was time for American Catholics to do their part in the work of spreading the Gospel throughout the world.

With the support of the Bishops of the United States, a new missionary seminary was built near Hawthorne, New York, on a beautiful hill which Father Price called “Mary’s Knoll”—a name which soon came to be applied to the community itself. Through a magazine, *The Field Afar* (later *Maryknoll Magazine*), Walsh and Price spread the word about the missions—and Maryknoll—to an ever-growing readership.

The new community expanded rapidly. In 1920, Mollie Rogers, a young Smith College graduate, became the foundress of “The Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic”—the Maryknoll Sisters.

Maryknoll was soon sending priests and sisters to many Asian countries, including China. But there were calls to serve closer to home, too. In 1920, Bishop O’Dea wrote to Maryknoll to ask for priests to serve Seattle’s growing Japanese community. No priests were available, but two Maryknoll Sisters—Gemma Shea and Teresa Sullivan—responded to O’Dea’s invitation. “When we entered Maryknoll,” Sister Gemma later said, “we thought we were going to spread the faith among people in foreign lands, but there we were on our way to Seattle.”

In Seattle, the Sisters found ample scope for their missionary efforts. Seattle had a bustling Japanese community of about 8,000. Most were not Catholic, but some traced their heritage proudly to the Japanese martyrs and to the Christian community around Nagasaki, where the faith had survived for centuries in secret, with no priests and no



**Above:** This painting of the Japanese Martyrs was placed in Our Lady, Queen of Martyrs Church by Father John Murrett, MM. **Below:** Children board the “Maryknoll bus,” 1920s. Courtesy Father Tom Marti, MM, and Maryknoll Seattle.

sacraments except baptism.

Within a few weeks the Sisters had identified a need: a kindergarten for Japanese children, who had limited access to education. The Sisters found a house on Spruce Street and on May 30, 1920, a hundred people crowded in for the opening ceremony, at which Cathedral Pastor Msgr. James Gordon Stafford presided in the absence of Bishop O’Dea.

Maryknoll School began with just sixteen children, but it grew rapidly. In the early part of 1921, the Sisters put out a plea to readers of *The Field Afar*, asking for “balls, dolls, toys, picture books, Mother Goose Rhymes, horse-reins, dolls’ furniture, kites, tops, boats, blocks, bean-bags, drawing materials, crayons, water-colors, colored paper, American flags, holy cards, pictures”! A dilapidated old bus brought children from all over the city and took them home again: “Its poor old bones rattle and

groan,” *The Field Afar* reported. “With a sudden spasm it comes to a standstill, then... gathers up its remaining strength and pants forward to the goal. Nevertheless, it is loved by hundreds of the children, who scream with delight, ‘Maryknoll Bus,’ when it comes into sight.”

What had begun as a small kindergarten soon grew into a thriving Catholic community, as many Japanese adults embraced the Catholic faith. Maryknoll priests arrived in 1924, and in 1930, Father John Murrett MM led the effort to build a dedicated church to serve as a spiritual home not only for Japanese Catholics, but also for the city’s growing Filipino Catholic community. The new church, located at 16th and Jefferson, was named Queen of Martyrs, honoring both the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Japanese martyrs. An image of the Japanese martyrs was hung in a place of honor, and the parish and school flourished for the next decade—until the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 sent shock waves through the nation—and through Queen of Martyrs Parish. *To be continued in the next issue.*

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy

*Want to know more?* This and many other important moments in the history of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest are vividly illustrated in *Journey of Faith*, the history of the Archdiocese of Seattle, available in the Cathedral Bookstore.