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PAPUA NEW GUINEA - JAPAN

The Japanese Church apologizes to Papua: "Peter To Rot's death is our fault"

The President of the Episcopal Conference Nippon writes a letter to the Catholic community of Oceania for the 100th anniversary of the birth of the blessed, who died for defending marriage against the brutality of the Japanese invaders: "We have no excuses, he was and is a model for all".

Rabaul (AsiaNews) - Japan "has done terrible things during the last war" and especially "deprived the Blessed Peter To Rot of his precious life. Ideological and religious differences are not an excuse, and that is why the Japanese Church apologizes", writes the president of the Japanese Episcopal Conference, Msgr. Leo Ikenaga, in a letter to the Catholic population of Papua New Guinea, gathered to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the blessed.

The celebration took place last July 7 at the shrine of Rakunai, in the province of East New Britain. The faithful and the clergy who met were very impressed by the sincerity of the apology of the Japanese prelates, and applauded the letter at great length. Archbishop Ikenaga also apologized for "the barbaric actions of the Japanese occupation forces" in Papua New Guinea. Here is the complete text of the letter:

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of blessed Pete To Rot, I would like to convey a message of apology to all of you in Papua New Guinea from Japan, which is responsible for his death.

First of all, I would like to reflect on Blessed Peter To Rot's life for a while.

Since Oceania covers a vast area, it is difficult for the Catholic Church to proclaim the Gospel there. When Peter To Rot was young, missionaries were rarely seen in Oceania, so he started to study to become a catechist. He was a model student respecting the Sacraments, praying regularly, and working hard as a faithful.

After graduation, he was qualified as a catechist by his bishop, and started to work earnestly at once. He married Paula Ia Varpit, a young Catholic from a neighboring village and lived an ideal family life.

During World War II, Japanese troops invaded Papua new Guinea, and imprisoned priests and the religious, whose number was already limited, in a concentration camp. He assumed responsibility as a catechist since there was no priest around, and devoted himself to pastoral services such as administering infant baptism and funerals, and assisting at marriages. Japanese troops even interfered in the Church's activities and destroyed Church buildings. They even forbade some systems based on Catholic teaching, especially monogamy, and forced people to return to polygamy.

However, Peter To Rot strongly insisted about his own marriage that the original meaning of marriage is being united by God, and it must be fulfilled only when married couples are united as

one. He decisively refused to change this view so that he was arrested, imprisoned, tortured and killed.

Japan is not a Christian country now and then. Catholics and Protestants in total account for only 0.09% of its population. Therefore the views on humanity and human life are totally different from those of Christian nations. The Japanese military during World War II did not share the Christian view on marriage at all. Putting aside the difference in religions and ideologies, it is true that Japan inflicted enormous damage from a humanitarian perspective on many nations including Papua New Guinea. Japan deprived Peter To Rot of his precious life by wielding inhumane power at will. I convey my heartfelt apology for such conducts on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the life of Blessed peter To Rot. As a Japanese bishop, I would like to offer a Mass and prayers on the anniversary day.