

# A celebration of remembrance

**Francis Yamashiro, O.F.M. Cap.**



09 January 2011



On 09 January 2011, a Mass was celebrated in Naha, Okinawa, Japan for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of our brother Francis Yamashiro. (The Japanese count the year of death as "1", so it is the twenty-fourth anniversary by the American way of counting.)

The Mass was requested by his family, although most are not Catholics. Naha Bishop Berard Oshikawa O.F.M. Conv. presided with retired Bishop Peter Baptist Ishigami O.F.M. Cap. and attended by the friar community of Saint Francis in Naha.

Many faithful participated in the celebration. After the mass, the customary offerings of incense were made at the table in front of the altar, at the adjoining Mausoleum, where a part of his cremated remains are preserved.

*Patrick Sullivan, O.F.M. Cap.*

**CELEBRATED AT SAINT FRANCIS FRIARY/MAUSOLEUM—NAHA, OKINAWA**

## A powerful journey of faith...

Kanéi Yamashiro, one of the eight children of Kansho and Omito Tome-Yamashiro was born on 01 March 1932 in Naha, Okinawa, Japan. At the time of his birth, Kanéi's father was the assistant headmaster of the Kakinohana Primary School in Naha where he would attend from 1938-1944.

When Kanéi was in the fourth grade, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. From that moment on, Okinawa was no longer a peaceful, quiet island in the Ryukyu chain. The entire island was mobilized for war. By the end of March, 1945, during the American pre-invasion air raids, Kanéi and his family fled to the mountains for shelter. They remained there during the invasion and until the end of July, 1945, suffering from sickness and starvation. It was during this time that his mother, father and sister died.

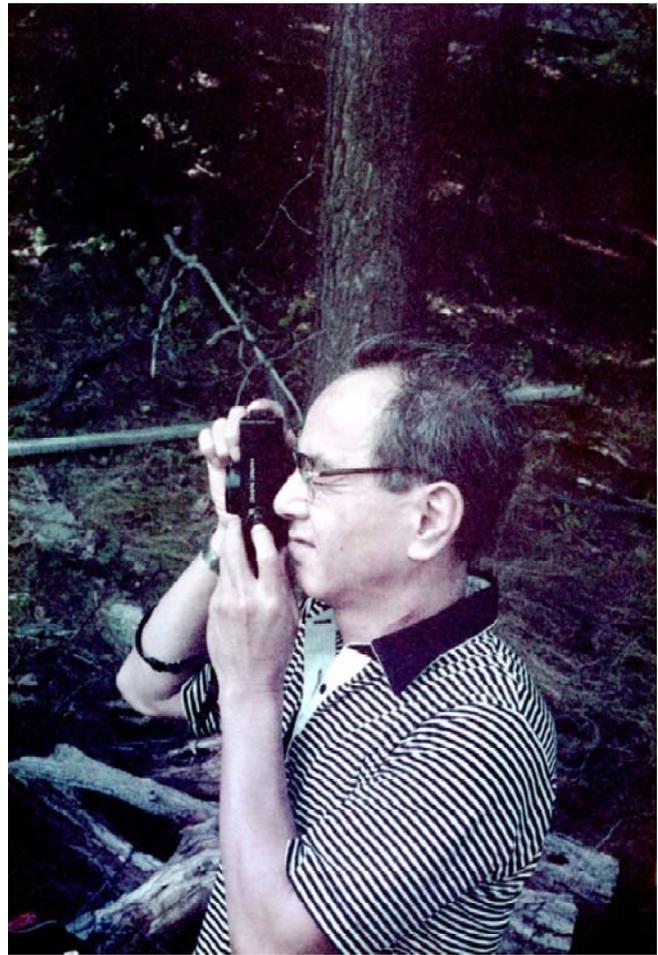
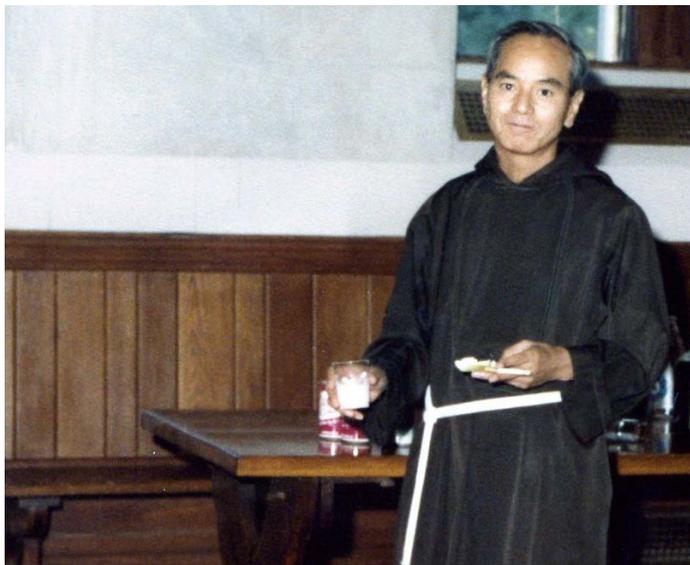
In order to financially assist his family, Kanéi was employed at the Naha Air Force Base as a restaurant worker from 1948-1950 and later a contracting manager for a salvage company from 1951-1959.

In 1959, Kanéi came to the United States under a work-study program and began his studies in business administration at Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio. He later continued his studies at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ, receiving his B.S. in accounting in 1963.

During his stay in South Orange, he also worked as a Japanese language instructor at the Berlitz Language School in Montclair, NJ.

It was during his studies at Seton Hall that Kanéi met our brother Dominic Silvestro, who was also studying at the university. He was deeply impressed when he learned that Dominic had been an M.I.T. graduate before deciding to study for the priesthood.

In the summer of 1960, Dominic invited Kanéi to spend a few days at St. Francis Retreat House in Garrison, NY. It was there that he befriended Mrs. Virginia Cunningham, a convert, who was the cook at the retreat house. She offered him a copy of Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* and according to Francis, read it without interruption. When he returned to Seton Hall in September, he began taking instructions from the spiritual director of the college.



Francis in Garrison, New York in 1983

On 25 June 1961, Kanéi Yamashiro was baptized *Francis* by Dominic Silvestro.

Following graduation, Francis returned to Okinawa and began Latin studies at the Saint Sulpice Seminary in Fukuoka, Japan until 1966. In the summer of 1967, Francis returned to the United States and was invested as a novice at St. Lawrence Friary in Milton, MA on 31 August 1967.

After his first profession on 01 September 1968, Francis continued his studies for the priesthood at the Capuchin Theological Seminary in Garrison [1968-1970] and the Maryknoll School of Theology in Ossining, NY [1970-1972].

On 15 December 1971, Francis returned to Okinawa and was ordained to the priesthood on 19 December 1971 by Capuchin Bishop Felix Ley, Apostolic Administrator of the Ryukyu Islands.

Our brother Francis Kanéi Yamashiro was the first Capuchin Franciscan friar-priest from Okinawa.

Following ordination, Francis returned to Garrison to complete his theological studies at Maryknoll. From June 1972-October 1972, Francis also took courses at Columbia University while residing with the friar community of Our Lady Queen of Angels in New York City.

Our brother Jeremiah Cassidy wrote: *For twenty years Francis walked a road of suffering. During a twelve year period, he underwent seven major operations and finally received his peaceful eternal reward on 09 January 1987 at the age of fifty-four.*

# “Mirai Kanai”—Good things come from across the sea

FATHER ANDREW DREW, O. F. M. CAP.

In the Okinawan language, there is an expression: “Mirai Kanai”, which has an almost mystical, religious significance. Roughly translated, it means: “Good things come from across the sea.” The great Christian mystic, St. Bernard said: *“Mary is the beautiful Star of the Sea that directs us to our heavenly country, leading us through the sea of this world to the port of Paradise.”*

I think the early life of Francis Yamashiro was guided by his good Okinawan upbringing and “Mirai Kanai.” His last years were guided by Mary, Star of the Sea and her Divine Son.

On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, 12 year old Yamashiro Kun perhaps did not know it was the Day of the Resurrection of the Lord. He did know that a vast armada of ships and war planes were bombarding and disgorging thousands of armed men on to the Okinawan beaches near his home in Naha. He must have wondered at what this had to do with the “good from the sea” – “Mirai Kanai.” Francis and his family suffered terribly during that battle of Okinawa. He did not have Christian Faith to sustain him, but he did survive and continued his search for “Mirai Kanai,” the good from beyond the sea.

After graduation from high school, Francis worked for a company whose business was salvaging the tons of scrap metal left from the fighting between Japanese and American forces. He saved his money and on his own, without benefit of government grants or scholarship aid, he set out beyond the sea to come to America to study at Seton Hall University. Here he discovered the greatest good from beyond the sea or anywhere else. He discovered Christ and rebirth in Him through Baptism and initiation into the Catholic Church.

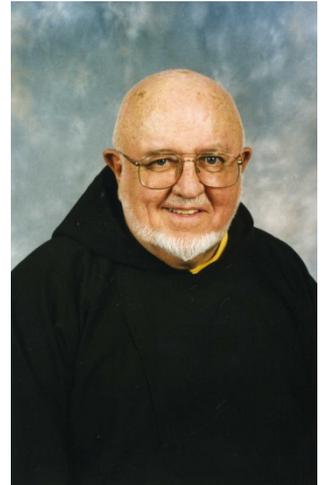
With other Okinawan college students studying in the United States, Francis Yamashiro came to visit us at Garrison during the Christmas holidays. Fr. Dominic Silvestro, in particular, befriended Francis and guided him into the Faith. Perhaps, in finding this greatest good, Francis said with our Lord in the Gospel of this Mass: *“Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, to You I offer praise; for what You have hidden from the learned and clever You have revealed to merest children...No one knows the Father but the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.”*

Not very long after receiving the Sacraments of Initiation, Francis responded to another call from Christ: *“Take My yoke upon your shoulders and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.”* Francis Yamashiro was gentle and humble of heart and he followed our gentle, humble Holy Father Saint Francis by becoming a Capuchin. Those who were in the novitiate and the clericate with Francis would know best-but only God knows how much Francis contributed to promoting knowledge and love of Okinawa’s people to our brothers in this Province and to those who have volunteered to work for the evangelization of Okinawa and all of Japan. I personally know the tremendous joy of all the Catholic people in Okinawa when Francis, our first Okinawan Capuchin, came home to serve his own people on their own island. This was “Mirai Kanai” for all of us Catholics on Okinawa. Fr. Francis, newly ordained, visited every parish, said Mass in each place, and spoke to almost every one of the 5,000 Catholic Okinawans.

The gentle, humble Francis Yamashiro served as a good brother to all of us Capuchins and as a good pastor of souls to his Okinawan brothers and sisters. Increasingly, his health failed but never his faithful bearing of the sweet yoke of Christ.

Now, Mary, Star of the Sea has guided Francis Yamashiro to the greatest “Mirai Kanai,” and I’m sure that, through the prayers, works and sufferings of Francis Yamashiro, she will continue to bless our Capuchin Order, the Province of Saint Mary and our Japanese Mission.

Again, in the words of St. Bernard: *“O you who feel tossed by the tempests in the middle of the shoals of this world, turn not from the Star of the Sea...In times of danger, of distress, or of doubt, think of Mary, call on Mary. Let the name of Mary be always on your lips and in your heart, and while invoking her intercession, do not fail to practice her virtues. Following her you cannot go astray; praying to her, you cannot be without hope; while she protects you, you have nothing to fear; while she leads the way, you find it easy; if she favors the voyage, you will reach the harbor in safety”* [Homily 2 on Missus est]. Eien no heiwa. Sayonara, Francis Yamashiro.



This Memorial Homily was given at the Monastery Church of the Sacred Heart Church in Yonkers, NY—14 January 1987.