

# ADVENT WITH BLESSED TAKAYAMA UKON



THE SAMURAI WHOSE HONOR KEPT  
HIM IN CHRIST

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The Samurai are arguably the most famous story of Japan; warriors wielding Katanas, Yaris, and wearing intricate armor dedicated to insane discipline and honor known as Bushido. But what if Bushido were coupled with a devout faith in Christ? What result would come from a Japanese code of honor engrained in the warrior people of a nation when it's threatened by the spread of Christianity?

**The life of one Samurai explains just that.**

Blessed Dom Justo Takayama Ukon was born Takayama Hikogorō in the Ashikaga Shogunate of Japan in 1552. His father, Takayama Tomoteru, converted to Christianity after meeting Portuguese missionaries. As the eldest, Justo was both heir to his father's land and power, making him the first of the children to be baptized, thus taking the name Justo (Latin: Iustus) at the age of 12.

As a boy, Takayama waned in his faith as he proved himself on the battlefield, leading him closer to the tradition of the time rather than the faith that had washed him clean. But at the age of 20, in the convalescence of his wounds from a duel, Takayama experienced a serious change of heart which made him grow closer to Christ and from that moment on, he would demonstrate the type of resilience that gave Samurai their fame.

From 1570 until 1587, Justo acquired and secured his position of daimyo alongside his father and waged war on behalf of Oda Nobunaga and later his successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He had served alongside the rulers in their destruction of the Buddhist warrior monks and countless enemies, but in 1587, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, now emperor of Japan, declared Christianity a threat to his empire. All of his lords had to renounce either their faith or their fiefs, and Takayama chose to renounce his castle rather than renounce Christ.



# ADVENT CHALLENGE



He endured persecution even under the protection of Lord Maeda Toshiie, from the council of five, but in 1614, years after Tokugawa Ieyasu became the leader of Japan, the persecution continued and he, along with 300 other Christians, departed Japan and resettled in Manila, Philippines where he passed away, 40 days later. Refusing to renounce his faith, Don Justo Takayama Ukon died a martyr, dedicated to Christ and living in His example.

As we prepare for the season of Advent, we must look inside ourselves and ask if we are living with the same fervor as Blessed Don Justo did. For these reasons, let's examine the traits that Samurai are known for:

1. Relationship Building
2. Self-discipline
3. Resilience



## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Relationship Building is the basis of any healthy life and just like one should build a network of friends that strengthen his or her social life, so too should one strengthen his or her relationship with the Lord and His church. Fruitful relationships such as mentorship and authentic Christian witnessing are paramount to laying the foundations of a healthy prayer life and a life with Christ. In the age of digital evangelization, it has never been easier to access resources that support our faith and guide us in prayer. While digital resources are great, better still are the human ones. The Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation are especially important as Advent approaches and in order for one to grow closer to the Lord, these should be engaged with the utmost respect and regularity. **As an action plan for the advent season, let's try these things:**

1

Attend a community event like a local YCP chapter event to strengthen your faith-based relationships

2

Download a prayer app such as Hallow

3

Attend Mass and Confession regularly

4

Join a bible study or one of your parish ministries



# SELF-DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline is the core of any success and as such, Samurai became as skilled in their craft from hours and hours of practice. Your faith should be seen similarly to your skill in a sport or hobby, almost a profession. The same can be said for prayer, fasting, and growing closer to God. Self-discipline is the pursuit of excellence and so you should integrate it into your daily life, not just weekends. If you do not strive to decrease so that Christ may increase, then you will only grow stagnant in your faith and discipline's opposite is not motivation, but stagnation.

**Things that you can do to improve your discipline include:**

**1**

Setting daily alarms for prayer

**2**

Planning daily devotional time

**3**

Integrating your faith in your life, not keeping it as a part of your life.



# RESILIENCE

Lastly, the final piece is resilience. In analyzing the life of Takayama, we know that he had risen to great prominence with his lands and in supporting Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, but as Christianity rose in Japan, Hideyoshi turned against his Christian nobles and the persecution only worsened as Tokugawa Ieyasu took power. We as the faithful must ask, do we live publicly for Christ? Are we willing to endure persecution in the name of the one-true God? Are we willing to give up comfort and material possessions to follow him? Resilience only grows as we live more honestly and in Christ. Reflect on times when you've been reluctant to stand up for your faith or others and on times when you've kept quiet about your own faith.

**Take some time to reflect on these 3 questions:**

1

Does everyone in your office know that you are a witness for Christ without asking?

2

Does your piety and practice show only at home or around your friends?

3

Are you willing to sacrifice all of your things to follow Christ?

There are many lessons that we can learn from Blessed Don Justo Takayama Ukon, but while we learn them, we must apply them, especially in this season of Advent as we draw closer to Christ's entrance in the world. Takayama lived his faith not in isolation, but he held his faith at the very center of his life. As a daimyo with lands, armies, and influence, Takayama didn't compartmentalize his Christianity but let his faith inform his leadership, even when it cost him everything. As Young Catholic Professionals, we are called to the same integration. We must ask ourselves as we aim to imitate Christ if we can follow the same discipline and resilience in our relationship with Christ that Blessed Takayama did, not just at home or at church, but in our workplaces where God has placed us. Are we building His Kingdom in our offices, our industries, our professional callings? With any great undertaking, any great devotion, the strength to achieve them rises like the tide. Hold fast and stand strong as you pursue them and remember that Jesus is the reason for the season.

**God Bless and Happy Advent!**

*Contributed by David Cancio, Member, YCP Palm Beach*



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