

Letter from Bulletin of August 11, 2002

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Dear Parishioners,

During this past week two historic and tragic events were observed. August 6th marked the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, killing over 300,000 people and contaminating the city for future generations. August 9th nearly 80,000 more were killed at Nagasaki, historically the center of Catholic life in Japan. Nagasaki was an alternative target that August 9, 1945, because of the cloud cover over the intended city. It was also the cloud cover over the Mitsubishi iron works that caused the pilot to fix his target instead on the Catholic Cathedral in Urakami, a district of the city that was home to the majority of Nagasaki's Catholics.

Six days later, on the feast of the Assumption of Mary, to whom the cathedral was dedicated, the war ended: August 15. "We must ask if this convergence of events – the ending of the war and the celebration of her feast – was merely coincidental or if there was here some mysterious providence of God." That's the comment of Dr. Takashi Nagai (1908-1951), dean of radiology at the University of Nagasaki, convert to Catholicism, survivor of the bomb, and "mystic of Nagasaki."

In the days after the bombing, after finding the charred remains of his beloved wife in their ruined home, a rosary clasped "among the powdered bones of her right hand," Takashi Nagai responded in a most remarkable way: in gratitude. His words, spoken at an open-air Requiem Mass just days after the bombing are counter-cultural and controversial, insisting on a redemptive meaning for the horrors:

We have disobeyed the law of love. Joyfully we have hated one another;

joyfully we have killed one another. And now at last we have brought this great and evil war to an end. But in order to restore peace to the world it was not sufficient to repent. We had to obtain God's pardon through the offering of a great sacrifice . . . Let us give thanks that Nagasaki was chosen for the sacrifice . . . May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Nagasaki, since the early Jesuit missions, has been the center of Japanese Catholicism, and consequently the scene of extensive martyrdom. Was this experience and spirituality the well-spring of Takashi's response, and the power source of his call to witness the cause of international peace?

In our own day and age of "weapons of mass destruction" and talk of "pre-emptive strikes", can we learn something from Nagasaki or from the Hiroshima Children's Monument that reads, "This is our city, this is our prayer, peace in the world."

Your Pastor,
Brian Joyce