

A REFLECTION ON THE DROPPING OF A NUCLEAR BOMB ON HIROSHIMA AND THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Last Thursday the 6th August, as I mentioned last week in my reflection, was the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord and it was also the 75th anniversary of the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima. This Sunday 9th August was the date when a second bomb was dropped and exploded on Nagasaki. So I thought today we could have a meditation on this poignant and ironic scenario: That the “powers” of the world decided to drop a bomb, a symbol of death and destruction, which brought about so much suffering and pain to so many, that happened to be on the same day that the Church decided to reveal Christ to the world in the glory of his Transfiguration, as symbol of goodness, beauty and hope.

I want to give you an eye witness account, of a man, whose name is Sunsao Tsuboi, who was a 20-year-old student at the time the bomb was dropped. This is what he says: “I remember a loud bang, then been blown into the air landing metres away. I regained consciousness and my shirt sleeves and trouser legs were ripped off by the force of the blast. My arms were badly burnt and there seemed to be something dripping from my fingertips. My back was incredibly painful, I had no idea it was a nuclear bomb and that I had been exposed to radiation. I only realised later that between 60,000 and 80,000 people were killed instantly, with temperatures soaring over 1,000,000C. Birds burst into flames mid-flight. Paper as far as 2km away ignited, entire houses were set alight. I was just out of the kilometre of the detonation, which helped me to survive. There was so much smoke in the air that you could barely see 100 metres ahead, but what I could see convinced me that I had entered a living hell on earth.

“I heard people crying out for help. I saw a schoolgirl with her eye hanging out of its socket. People looked like ghosts, bleeding and trying to walk before collapsing. Some had lost limbs. There were charred bodies everywhere, including the river. I looked down and saw a man clutching his stomach, trying to stop his organs from spilling out. The smell of burning flesh was overpowering.

“Half –hour after the explosion black rain fell in the form of dark droplets of mud, dust, soot and radiation. Dead fish floated to the surface of the ponds and rivers, yet poor, burnt, desperate survivors drank the rain.

“After a few days, the first symptoms of radiation sickness were evident; there was fever, fatigue, bleeding in the gums and under the skin. This was all cell damage cause by radiation. Hair thinned and eventually just broke off. Diarrhoea, which in some cases lasted 3 months, came from damaged cells lining the intestines. Over 150,000 died within two months and there were more deaths over the next few months either from radiation or from injuries and burns. The survivors of Hiroshima were scarred mentally and physically and long term effects expressed itself in all forms of cancer. It is said that there were about 2,000 survivors who have died of cancer by the year 2000, the worst being leukaemia. The signs of this blood cancer began appearing in children two to three years after the bomb”

Yet, the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord has a much greater, deeper and richer legacy: Two days after the bombing, Manhattan Project physician Dr Harold Jacobsen was quoted saying that nothing would grow in Hiroshima for 70 years. After all, the earth was scorched and melted. Around 90% of the city's buildings had been within 3km of the impact zone. The explosion wiped out 76,000 houses, along with 80,000 people. Any plant or animal life was incinerated.

Yet, around one month after the bombing, just 800 metres from the centre of the explosion, red canna flowers sprouted in rubble of Hiroshima's wasteland. This was seen as a miraculous event, which gave great hope and courage to the survivors. Some scientists believe that even a bomb a hundred times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima would not stop plants growing. By the spring of 1946 cherry trees were revived and by the summer oleander (hollyander) flowers – known for their resilience and now the official flower of Hiroshima – were in bloom. In less than three years fruit and vegetables such as tomatoes and cucumbers were grown among the shacks multiplying in the city's midst.

Today Hiroshima is green once more and there are 170 trees that are survivors themselves of the blast and consist of 32 species and just 370 metres from the blast centre stands a defiant symbolic weeping willow. Just like Hiroshima's human victims, they live on.

The power of the Transfiguration of the Lord indeed lives on. Ten thousand Hiroshima's could not destroy the effects of the Transfiguration that brings new life into all those who have faith in Christ. Whatever problems and difficulties we have to face, we know that we will rise from the ashes of devastation, from broken dreams and promises, from the suffering and pain that surrounds us and overcome the clouds of fear that hangs over us, we will rise to newness of life.

As we continue to battle with the Global effects of the Coronavirus we can be assured that the transforming power of the risen Christ will bring us the lasting peace that this world cannot give. We particularly remember the recent terrible explosion in Beirut, where over 150 people were killed and over 5,000 people injured and many of them very seriously hurt; over a quarter of a million people were made homeless. Lebanon is a country that is also struggling to fight the Covid-19 virus, which already took its hospitals to capacity. We continue to pray for them in their need. May the transforming power of the risen Christ be with them.

PS It's night time and a drunken guy is crawling along the road looking for something. A passer-by offers to help and asks what he is looking for. The drunken guy replies that he has lost his watch. "And whereabouts did he you lose it?" asks the passer-by. "About half-a-mile down the road", says the drunken guy. "So why are you looking for it here?" asks the passer-by. The drunken guy replies, "Well, there's more light up here".