

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Feb 6th 2015

Memorial of Saint Paul Miki and Companions, Martyrs

Janice was a new Catholic when she got the opportunity to spend a couple of years teaching school in Japan. She loved the opportunity but eventually felt the need to get away for the weekend. Her first trip was to Hiroshima. She walked the streets, visited the museum, and checked out a local restaurant or two. She said it was surreal. It was as if a dark cloud hovered over the city. People were not very friendly and the way they carried themselves communicated anger and sorrow. In her opinion the residents were a people who still lived in the shadow of the atom bomb that devastated the city on August 6, 1945.

Several months later Janice took another weekend trip to Nagasaki. She was shocked. People in the streets seemed genuinely happy. There was an air of joy in the city. She did not know anything at all about Hiroshima and Nagasaki before these trips, except that she knew about the bombs. She had no clue as to why the atmospheres would be so different. Then she went to the museum in Nagasaki and what was the first picture she saw on the wall? It was the Urakami Cathedral. It is estimated that five to ten thousand Catholics were killed in the blast. The reaction of the Catholics that survived shocked the world. Dr. Takashi Nagai survived the blast and could find only the hand of his wife, identified by the melted rosary it clutched. Yet, instead of cursing the darkness, he saw in the death of his Catholic brothers and sisters the sacrifice necessary to end the war. In one of his speeches he said, "Was not Nagasaki the chosen victim, the lamb without blemish, slain as a whole burnt offering on an altar of sacrifice, atoning for the sins of all the nations during World War II?" To Dr. Nagai, the blood of the Christians was the seed that sprouted peace.

Was it simply the presence of those WWII Catholics that helped coin the phrase, "Shouting Hiroshima, praying Nagasaki"? No, three hundred years earlier the blood of the martyrs bathed Nagasaki. Today we celebrate the martyrdom of Paul Miki and his companions. Although Christianity had been welcomed in Japan, things changed and the emperor determined to stamp it out. Paul Miki, a novice in the Society of Jesus and a seminarian, along with twenty-five others, were rounded up, marched through the country to be made an example of, and then were crucified in Nagasaki. From their crosses they sang hymns of praise to God. Paul Miki was the same age as Jesus when he died. From his cross he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. He said, "The sentence of judgment says these men came to Japan from the Philippines, but I did not come from any other country. I am a true Japanese. The only reason for my being killed is that I have taught the doctrine of Christ. I certainly did teach the doctrine of Christ. I thank God it is for this reason I die. I believe that I am telling only the truth before I die. I know you believe me and I want to say to you all once again: Ask Christ to help you to become happy. I obey Christ. After Christ's example I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as a fruitful rain."

All holy men and women who bathed Nagasaki and the world with their blood, pray for us.

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