

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

-Vigil Mass-

A couple of years ago, I had an opportunity to visit Nagasaki, Japan. I went to the cathedral of Nagasaki which was rebuilt in 1959. In the cathedral, I saw Hibaku no Maria which means “bombed Mary.” It was the head of a wooden statue of Mary immaculate, once placed above the altar. It was found on the ground after the bombing. The face was burned and her eyes of glass were melted by the heat of the bomb.

August 9th, 1945, just a week before the solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, an atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan. The pilot who tried to drop the bomb on the munitions factory as the primary target failed to drop the bomb because of the cloud. Then he headed to the second target, the city of Nagasaki. Eventually, he found the spot which had no cloud and dropped the bomb. It was Urakami, which is the largest Catholic area in

Japan. The atomic bomb was dropped 0.6 miles away from the cathedral of Nagasaki. At that time, following their tradition, the parishioners were having a confession as a preparation for the Solemnity of Assumption at the cathedral.

The cathedral was totally destroyed and two priests and many parishioners who were having confession were presumed to have died instantly. According to one theory, approx. 15,000 Christians were living in this area and more than 10,000 of them were killed.

After the bombing, amid the collapsed columns and scorched debris of the cathedral, a monk found this *Hibaku no Maria*, “the bombed Mary.” And soon the Mary statue became the symbol of hope, peace, and healing to the Christian survivors in Nagasaki. Many people who have visited the cathedral and saw her burned face and empty eyes are often struck by the sense of motherly compassion.

Atomic bomb which was dropped on Nagasaki was the symbol of destruction and death. However, even the midst of discriminate destruction, Mary, the symbol of peace and life gave comfort and hope to the Catholics in Nagasaki.

Today, we celebrate the vigil of Assumption of Virgin Mary. Through this celebration, we celebrate the hope of eternal life which God has promised us. In the gospel today, Jesus says "blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

And this word is, most of all, the word of Hope in Christ resurrection. Virgin Mary heard the word of hope and kept in her heart throughout her whole life. Even when she had to watch her son's suffering and death of the cross, Mary kept the hope in the promise of God which has revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. Eventually, when she completed the course of her earthly life, she participated in her Son's glorious resurrection through the assumption. Her body and soul were taken up into heavenly glory.

In the glory of her Assumption, Mary—Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church—anticipates the destiny of the Church. Throughout the course of our lives, we each encounter difficulties, sufferings, and trials. Perhaps some of us are struggling with a difficult relationship, financial burdens, emotional pain, or a physical issue. This is the human condition in a world broken by sin. However, in the glory of Assumption of Mary, we are able to have the hope of resurrection even in midst of sufferings and darkness. We can have the hope that we too will attain the glory of the Resurrection and the fulfillment of our hope in her Son's promises in future.

Therefore, when we encounter darkness, suffering, and trouble in our lives, we may look to Mary and have hope. Mary, who became the symbol of hope amidst of the tragedy of Nagasaki, watches over us and gives us hope and comfort.