Feast of Our Lord’s Transfiguration  
Cycle A, 8.6.17  
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Matthew 17:1-9

IT’S SUMMERTIME – 
AND THE LIVIN’ ISN’T SO EASY!

What kind of world would you like to live in? I have to say, for myself, that it would be a world vastly different than the one we now inhabit. A world with less violence in our cities, with less disparity between the rich and the poor, where people don’t have to flee their homeland to escape danger, where discrimination and hatred don’t set people and nations at odds with each another. I would like to inhabit a world in which, as the summertime song goes, “the livin’ is easy,’ or at least easier than it is for so many people today. A world conformed more closely to the words of a hymn we sometimes sing: “In Christ there is no East or West, in him no south or north, but one great family bound by love throughout the whole wide earth.” What kind of world would you like to live in?

In Christ there is no East nor West...

As we mark the date of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima seventy-two years ago, at 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945, all of us are given cause to reflect on our world and our common humanity – and a grim reality, an event that marked us even before most of us were born. This anniversary, given the current tensions with North Korea, forces us to review history through the eyes of participants and to ponder the significance of this human tragedy which profoundly shaped our national consciousness.

The tension between the morality or the immorality of the use of the atomic bomb was brought out very pointedly to me in an article published several years ago in the San Francisco Chronicle. The story, subtitled “Brothers split by war and circumstance,” traced the fate of two Japanese brothers from Hiroshima -- one serving in the U.S. Army, Lieutenant Harry Fukuhara, and his brother Frank who served in the Japanese Imperial Army. Circumstances had put these two on opposite sides of a horrible military conflict. Now, many years later, Harry still believed that the bomb shortened the war and ultimately saved lives. The other, Frank, could not say that the use of the bomb was justified. He recalled too vividly the image of their 13-year old cousin Kimiko. “She had just finished her wartime work duties at school and was on the roof of the building when the bomb struck. Blinded by the flash and badly burned, she crawled half a mile to a temporary hospital. Minutes after her mother found her she died.” The article summarized for me the moral dilemma in a simple but telling sentence... “The memory of Hiroshima is painful for both brothers.”
The picture of the mushroom cloud is etched in our national and human consciousness as much as the photo of Neil Armstrong’s first step on the moon. The city of Hiroshima was built mostly of wood. After the explosion, the few structures made of concrete stood in a wasteland. No one knew if grass would grow again there or if humans could ever safely live there. Estimates of 70 to 80 thousand people were killed outright by the explosion. Eventually there would be 130,000 casualties, dying because of radiation and sickness. A large group of survivors suffered throughout their lives with health problems. They were called *hibakusha* -- explosion-affected people.

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In the center of the city where the bomb struck there now stands a half-destroyed building called the ‘Atomic Dome.’ It is surrounded by a peace park. Today at 8:15 services began when survivors and their children say a silent prayer for peace. Later, all will gather at the Cenotaph, a monument bearing the names of all who died because of the bomb. One of the most popular monuments in the park is a statue of a young girl who died from the effects of radiation. While in the hospital battling her illness she made paper cranes, traditional Japanese symbols of peace which she gave to others as a gesture of love and reconciliation.

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Tonight after dark and every year on the anniversary, children set paper lanterns afloat in the Ohta River. Each lantern bears the name of someone who has died. As the children float their lanterns, they sing a refrain: “*So long as this life lasts, give peace back to us, peace that will never end.*” The message of Hiroshima and the story told by the Peace Memorial Park at the site of the bombing is that war is senseless and that no one can come out a winner. The fate of the earth is now in our own hands. A nuclear war fought today would be vastly different than World War II. There would be no victory parades or national rejoicing. Pope John Paul II said when he visited Hiroshima, “*In the past it was possible to destroy a village, a town, a region, even a country. Now the whole planet has come under threat.*” Our challenge is to insure that this cannot, will not happen.

Ironically, the first atomic bomb was dropped on the Feast of Our Lord’s Transfiguration, August 6 -- today’s feast. There atop Mount Tabor, three people were dazed by a brilliant light. Peter, James and John were taken aback by the light that
became dazzling white. There too something happened to a man’s skin. The gospel says the appearance of Jesus’ face was changed, altered. The light on this mountaintop did not bring destruction, but the vision of a new humanity. Jesus, transformed by the power of God’s love, stands in the midst of history -- between Moses and Elijah -- the law and the prophets. Jesus, acknowledged as the Son of God, bears the blessing of God not the human curse of Hiroshima. There too a cloud appeared and overshadowed them. It was not the mushroom cloud symbolizing doom and destruction, but the cloud from which God’s voice affirmed Jesus as his beloved, his chosen One. Jesus was transfigured to signal his followers and us that God is to be found in our midst. We must look for divine presence not in some other world, but here in this world which we have been given to shape and to form, to tend and to transform.

The growing hostility between the US and Russia, and with North Korea and Iran, makes it more urgent than ever to reduce the risk of nuclear war, as well as to rethink plans to spend a trillion dollars replacing US nuclear weapons with new ones that will be more suited for launching a first-strike. Nuclear war can be triggered intentionally or through miscalculation, terror or error, and our government and all nations must strive toward reducing and ultimately eliminating this danger. In May, a conference was held at MIT sponsored by the “Future of Life Institute.” Professionals from government, education and other fields came together to address this pressing concern. Topics included: “Investing in Minds, not Missiles,” “Build Housing, not Bombs,” “Maintaining the Iran Nuclear Agreement,” “Divesting From Nuclear Weapons Investment.” There are concrete and deliberate actions that our country and all the leading countries in the world can take to end nuclear proliferation. And we, as citizens and people of faith, cannot stand idly by.

Our constant prayers for peace must be accompanied by action on our part: Sign the petitions that come to your email inbox urging our president and national leaders never to consider a nuclear strike as a valid option; use the power of the pen to write our Congressional leaders to use negotiation as the first and most critical means of preventing war; be alert to the methods and devices of propaganda that would try to justify the use of nuclear weapons. And, most of all, let our own hearts be converted to the ways of peace. Take to heart the words of today’s epistle concerning the message and the light of Jesus: “Keep your attention closely fixed on it, as you would a lamp shining in a dark place until the first streaks of dawn appear and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

John Kasper, OSFS