

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A few years ago I read a very compelling book about a heroic survivor of the bombing of Nagasaki, Japan at the end of World War II. Marist Father Paul Glynn, in his book [A Song for Nagasaki: The Story of Takashi Nagai, Scientist, Convert, and Survivor of the Atomic Bomb](#), tells a compelling story of conversion, reconciliation and compassion. Takashi Nagai was a highly regarded and notable scientist who, in the aftermath of the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, dedicated his life to the care of those suffering the effects of radiation. He lost his own wife as a result of the dropping of the atomic bombs. His service was complete and total; he himself succumbed to exposure of radiation while treating his patients. Nagai had a profound conversion experience, became a Roman Catholic, and was a tireless proponent of peace among peoples.

In reflecting upon the profound suffering and sadness experienced by the Japanese people in the aftermath of World War II, Nagai wrote: "Suffering, gracefully accepted, refines the human heart, and the experience of darkness sharpens the vision of the spirit. After meeting with Keller (Helen) and Miyagi I wrote that unless you have suffered and wept, you really don't understand what compassion is, nor can you give comfort to someone who is suffering. If you haven't cried, you can't dry another's eyes. Unless you've walked in darkness, you can't help wanderers find the way. Unless you've looked into the eyes of menacing death and felt its hot breath, you can't help another rise from the dead and take anew the joy of being alive."

Today's readings offer a reflection on the dichotomy between impulsiveness and revenge versus righteousness and forgiveness. Abishai wants David to wreak revenge upon his enemy Saul, who himself is hunting down David. David's response to Abishai is both magnanimous and surprising: "Do not harm him, for who can lay hands on the Lord's anointed and not remain unpunished?" Then David is seen on the hilltop, a symbol of standing on holy ground, surveying the encampment of Saul. Saul has opened himself up for recrimination and yet David's response is: "The Lord will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness. Today, though the Lord delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the Lord's anointed." The Psalmist echoes this sense of justice and righteousness in terms of how the Lord deals with each one of us. "The Lord is kind and merciful; he has put our transgressions from us; and as a father has compassion on his children the Lord is compassionate to all who honor him." David himself, a complex figure in history, knows what it means to be chosen to lead despite glaring personal weaknesses. Thus, his sense of mercy and justice is rooted deeply in the knowledge of having been forgiven himself.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives a framework in which to interact with our brothers and sisters in families, in communities, in any situation in which human beings are gathered together. Jesus offers a very challenging and yet ultimately liberating way for us to proceed. He calls on us to not condemn, not to judge, and to forgive (parenthetically, ourselves as well). This is a difficult proposition at times to live. Yet, with God's grace, what we measure out will indeed be returned in full measure. Praise be to God!

Fr. Tom