August 6, 2017

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord
Dn 7:9-10, 13-14
2 Pt 1:16-19
Mt 17:1-9

By Don Timmerman

As we celebrate the Transfiguration of the Lord, let us recall on this day in 1945, during World War II (1939-45), an American B-29 bomber dropped the world’s first deployed atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima and issued in another type of transfiguration. The explosion wiped out 90 percent of the city and immediately killed 80,000 people; tens of thousands more would later die of radiation exposure. Three days later, a second B-29 dropped another A-bomb on Nagasaki, killing an estimated 40,000 people. Japan’s Emperor Hirohito announced his country’s unconditional surrender in World War II in a radio address on August 15, citing the devastating power of “a new and most cruel bomb.” The U.S. is the only country to have used the atomic bomb on another country. The reason given by those who delivered the bomb is that it saved lives. The reasoning here is that some lives are more important than others. American lives are more important than Japanese lives. It is alright to kill others in order to save our own.

This is not Christian. For a Christian, all lives, even the lives of our enemies, are important. The Chaplain of those who delivered the bombs later regretted being part of this dreadful thing. Christ’s transformation is celebrated to shed light on our lives. Christ is asking us to transform our lives, to live a life with the belief that there is another life hereafter, and thus become transfigured. Our life on earth is only temporary...not long at all. However, our real life is yet to be. Christ explained over and over again to His disciples that being crucified and killed was not the end of his life, but the beginning of a new life. Should Christ have tried to protect Himself and His family by trying to kill those who were trying to kill him? Certainly in our society if he had tried to protect himself and his family by killing the enemy he would be considered a hero. Maybe in the eyes of the world, but not in the eyes of Christ. What did Christ tell us about protecting ourselves with violence? He never once said that it is alright for a follower of his to use violence to stop violence being done to oneself and the family. He told Peter who was trying to protect Christ by cutting the ear off of the soldier arresting Him that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Instead, He said, “Love your enemies, do good to them and pray for them” Could we ever conceive a time when Christ would have picked up a weapon and killed others to save himself or his family or innocent people? Did he ever condone this type of behavior to his followers? Certainly not. Christ’s message was clear. “What good is it to gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of one’s soul?” What good is it to save your earthly life by refusing to follow the command of Christ, and suffer the loss of eternal life? For Christ it is more noble and heroic to do good to those making you suffer and threatening your life than going out and torturing and killing those doing this to you and your family.
When we were baptized, we agreed to live differently than others in the world. We are now to live by doing good, not bad to the enemy. We are refusing to intentionally harm anyone for any reason, whether it be for profit, protection, money, power or honor and glory. If our earthly lives are taken from us for doing this, we believe that we will be transformed into a new life with Christ. St. Paul wrote, “Death, where is thy sting?”

Please join us in trying to give Christ’s message to others. We may do this by holding up signs asking people to love, not harm, their enemies. We may do this by fasting and prayer. We may do this by refusing orders given by people who promote violence, sometimes even going to jail for it. We may do this by telling others that it is not to join the armed forces and do the opposite of what Christ asked of us. We may do this by joining peace groups like the Catholic Worker or Peace Action. When Christ asked us to spread the Word far and wide all over the world He did it to help us to understand his message of peace and love and to practice it in our daily lives. Unless we transform our lives like Christ did we will have more and more bombs dropped, more people dying and living in misery. “A hero is one who makes an enemy a friend.” (Talmud)

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