

18th Sunday - Rich and Poor

Don't store up your treasure for yourself. Is it the treasure or the storing up of it that matters most? Do the rich actually go to hell and the poor heaven? I think not. There are saints in heaven who were rich on earth – but they did not store up their treasure for themselves, they shared it with others. It is not your wealth or the lack of it that impacts your holiness but your attachment to it. Sometimes the rich are allies of the poor being philanthropic so as to help and assist others (e.g. Founder of Domino's Pizza, Tom Monaghan, raised in a Catholic orphanage, ran the business for 38 years while providing for Catholic needs, not to mention, Ave Maria University - *Domino* means for the Lord).

What is of greater concern today is the malaise of materialism that is strident in our society. What is materialism? It is a bitter fruit, a toxic poison of last centuries atheistic ideologies, that proclaims that only things matter. In short, it is when we exchange the value of a person for the want of a thing. Saint John Paul, who spent his life fighting the regimes of Marxism, Nazism and Fascism claimed the effects of material consumerism are the exaltation of the individual and the selfish satisfaction of personal aspirations which become their goals. Today, Pope Leo likewise has voiced concerns about materialism and its impact on faith when he highlighted a global crisis of faith, with growing secularism and a reliance on technology, money, and pleasure over spiritual values.

Unbridled consumerism has deprived our world of true treasure, where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. The richest 10% of the world's population holds over half of the global income, while the poorest 50% share only 8%. Nearly half of the world's population – 3.4 billion people – is living on less than \$5.50 a day. Global poverty is one of the most pressing problems that the world faces today. The poorest in the world in Africa, Asia, South America, are undernourished, they have no electricity, safe drinking water, adequate health facilities and so on.

Such issues are global and ideological, so we are limited in what we can do. However, at times, God does remind us through individuals how valuable each and every person is and how we can build bridges of peace. In August, we remember 80 years ago the bombing of Japan, though it ended the war, it was a barbaric human atrocity with the death of hundreds of thousands. Presently prelates from the USA are on the way to Hiroshima and Nagasaki on its 80th anniversary, just as in the past Cardinal Gilroy with our Bishop Henry Kennedy visited Japan, in 1949 to engender peace in the world. On such an occasion who cannot but think of the book by Fr. Paul Glynn entitled *Song for Nagasaki* about Dr. Takashi Nagai. He died in 1951 and was a Japanese Catholic physician who survived the atomic bomb. Raised as an atheist, he attended Midnight Mass in 1932 and was impressed by the Catholics in prayer, their singing, their faith and the sermon. Later he said: "I felt somebody close to me whom I did not still know." By means of the good example of Midori, his future wife, whose legacy of faith inspired him, he was baptized in 1934. When Dr. Nagai whose pioneer work in radiology had caused him leukaemia, Midori replied: "Whether you live or die, it is for God's glory."

In the evening of 6 August, Nagai learned that an atomic bomb had been dropped by the Americans on Hiroshima. With Midori, he decided to take their children away to the countryside, accompanied by Midori's mother. On 9 August 1945, at 11:02 am, the second atomic bomb struck Nagasaki. At the time of the atomic bombing, Dr. Nagai was working in the radiology department of Nagasaki Medical College Hospital. He received a serious injury but joined the rest of the surviving medical staff in dedicating themselves to treating the atomic bomb victims. He wrote a 100 page medical report about his observations detailing the "concentric circles of death" around the epicentre of the blast. On 11 August, he found his house destroyed and his wife dead. Months later, Nagai was seriously ill with death imminent, but when he drank some holy water from Lourdes he seemed to improve. Also, he sought the intercession of Fr. Kolbe whose friars had assisted after the bomb. He returned to the epicentre and built a small hut from pieces of his old house and remained there with his two surviving children (Makoto and Kayano), his mother-in-law, and two other relatives. On 23 November 1945, a Mass was celebrated, in front of the ruins of the cathedral, for the victims of the bomb. Takashi gave a speech filled with faith, comparing the victims to a sacred offering to obtain peace. In the following years, Nagai began to write books, the first was *The Bells of Nagasaki*. Although he failed to find a publisher at first, eventually it became a best seller and the basis for a top box-office movie in Japan. On 3 December 1949, he was given notoriety in the city of Nagasaki. He received a visit from Helen Keller in 1948 and the following year by the Emperor and Cardinal Gilroy. On 1 May 1951, he asked to be transported to the college hospital in Nagasaki so that the medical students could observe the last moments of a man preparing to die from leukaemia. After treatment, he regained his consciousness and prayed: "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, into your hands, I entrust my soul." Then he took the cross from the hand of his son Makoto, and said: "Please pray!" He died at the age of 43. On May 14, an official ceremony took place in memory of Nagai and an estimated 20,000 people attended. The city of Nagasaki observed one minute of silence while the bells of all the buildings rang. His life of prayer and suffering for world peace earned him national fame that has fostered his cause for canonization as a Servant of God.