

Hiroshima Day August 6, 2023 Sydney Town Hall

For 78 years, the earth and its inhabitants have lived under the threat of nuclear destruction. Trillions of dollars have gone into their development and maintenance, while actual human needs of shelter, health care, food, and education are deeply underfunded.

Since its founding in 1945, Pax Christi has prioritised the work of nuclear disarmament and is member of the ***International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons***. Many Christian churches celebrate The Feast of the Transfiguration. The mountain top experience gave them a glimpse of Jesus that stretched their imaginations where they saw themselves as part of something bigger – to be courageous instruments of justice and compassion. On that mountain, they hear a voice that calls, 'Listen to him (Jesus)!' But the one who is transfigured on the mountain will soon be disfigured on the cross and points to the disfigured in the world. This feast also commemorates a **disfiguration**. As Jesus climbed the mountain, on this day pilots climbed into cockpits to kill 100's of 1000's of people. As we remember the mushroom-shaped cloud that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we keep killing our siblings and disfiguring the Earth. The disfiguration continues. The historian John Dower in his book ***Cultures of War***, *'The policy makers, scientists, and military officers who had committed themselves to becoming death... never seriously considered not using their devastating new weapon. They did not talk about turning mothers into cinders or irradiating even the unborn. They brushed aside discussion of alternative targets, despite the urging of many lower-echelon scientists that they consider this. They gave little if any serious consideration to whether there should be ample pause after using the first nuclear weapon to give Japan's frazzled leaders time to respond before a second bomb was dropped.'* They just did it, twice, and the world changed radically. Almost 80 years later, a global leader is once again evidently considering the possible use of what are now called 'tactical nuclear weapons' even more powerful than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The call to us is to listen. Who is listening the hibakusha? Who is listening to the many voices speaking against the evil of nuclear possessions, the manufacture of more lethal weapons, threats against nations, the abuse of power, everyday hatred, rivalry, violence, greed, bullying and disfiguring of peoples' reputations? The call from the mountain is to proclaim peace by our lives, our actions, and words. We have a choice. Our every choice can be liberating or diminishing of others and our world. There are voices that are provoking war more than peace. Who is listening to the voices of the Japanese people crying for a nuclear free world. There are voices calling for peace and dialogue because we are siblings, such as Pope Francis. There are voices calling for acknowledgement of their presence for 60,000 years. There are voices of peoples impacted around the world because of climate change whether rising waters or ferocious fires. There are voices of people such as Palestine, Papua and Kurdistan for independence. Let us listen to these voices calling to us.

The Transfiguration was a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Hiroshima was a turning point in human history. Both involved light. One was the light of love, life and hope and the other a deadly light, the death of everything for generations, of mass murder and ongoing threat. Pope Francis (2019) asks *'How can we propose peace if we constantly invoke the threat of nuclear war as a legitimate recourse for the resolution of conflicts?'* He has repeatedly said that the mere possession of nuclear weapons is immoral. They do not ensure stability and peace. They give a false sense of security sustained by mentality of fear and mistrust that poisons relationships between peoples and obstructing any possible form of real dialogue. He calls us to rediscover each other as brothers and sisters and be united in solidarity and friendship, to witness to our common humanity. But are we listening? Are we listening to the prophetic voices of the hibakusha survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who continue to serve as a warning to us and for coming generations? The AUKUS defence agreement with the United States and the United Kingdom would not lead to a more peaceful world. It will not contribute to a peaceful society at home or abroad. Increased military spending on nuclear technology would come at the expense of social services. This agreement means that Australia would continue to live in the shadow of the US. We know where this has led from US-led wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, AUKUS sends a strong signal that Australia sees itself as an adversary to China.

Many among us live in a prison of passivity. We have created our own prisons where we convince ourselves that we are safe because the authorities have installed a sacred umbrella to protect us. We have stopped the casual or nonchalant acceptance and support of psychotic rulers who promote first-strike nuclear war. We cannot embrace hopelessness as a way of life - the feeling that we have no power. We might feel we are in the wilderness with our protests. Let's make them anyway.

End nuclear weapons now before they end us. Stop escalating the war in Ukraine now.

Make peace with Russia and China now.

We can counter hatred with love. Compassion, sharing, generosity, sobriety, and responsibility are for us the choices that nurture *personal fraternity*. We can promote **social fraternity** that recognises equal dignity for all, that fosters friendship and belonging, promotes education, equal opportunities, decent work and social justice, hospitality, solidarity and cooperation, social solidarity economy and a just ecological transition, a sustainable agriculture that ensures access to food for all, thus favouring harmonious relationships based on mutual respect and caring for the welfare of all. And we can build an **environmental fraternity** by making peace with nature, knowing that we are interconnected.

We cannot allow God's dream for humanity to become a nightmare because of war which is often more enticing than peace by promoting profit for a few at the expense of the wellbeing of entire populations. This money is money soiled with innocent blood. It is not too late to prioritize peace.

Western media often fail to report on the fears of billions of human beings around the world who want a just peace that includes a chance for sustainable development. Politicians and media try to justify the unjustifiable. They systematically whitewash their crimes by engaging in a form of totalitarian censorship and a vicious persecution of whistle-blowers who tell us about crimes committed in our name. Indeed, secrecy is an enabler of crime. That secrecy ignored the critical voices who then argued against the need to drop a bomb, or two, on Japanese cities that were already devastated by U.S. fire-bombings. That secrecy does not address the health impacts of the research, testing, and production of such weapons, which still cause disease and death as victims of nuclear weapons' development as were the people impacted by the fallout from U.S. nuclear testing in the Western United States and the Marshall Islands in the Western Pacific, uranium miners on First Nations lands, and many others.

The coming into force of the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) in 2021 is a sign of hope though nuclear weapons states have yet to join. The very existence of this treaty helps to delegitimise the development and possession of nuclear weapons. We need to abolish nuclear weapons before they abolish us. In 1986, President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev took the first steps in history to reduce the number of nuclear weapons. It was done and can be repeated.

Let's work for the elimination of these weapons. The threat of nuclear war has not gone away. We learn today that it is possible to see things differently and act differently. It is possible to recognise the sacredness and dignity in each other. It is possible that we can live together in our diversity, to work for peace at home and abroad, to let go of racism and hatred for homosexuals and gender diverse people, to let go of greed, power, to let go of the need to control, to give up violence in word and action, to let go of fear that leads to paralysis and inaction. Thank you for your presence here.