

MANNA *in the wilderness*

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Pain, Paradox and Spiritual Practice

by Julia Occhiogrosso

I noticed that the stones giving shape to the labyrinth were losing distinction from the dusty, gray gravel on the ground where they lay. So when the pandemic began and we had to stop the soup line and put all of our ministries on hold, painting the labyrinth stones moved in as a priority and seemed an apt way to fill this newfound free time.

In this new moment when daily routines are disrupted and everything I thought I knew, or claimed control of, and everything I plan for is shifting like quicksand underfoot, walking the labyrinth becomes a prayerful practice that allows me to hold the grief, confusion and anxiety. Its circular movements, a metaphor for the life journey, weave me in and around and out again.

I awake at night on the edge of the unconscious knowledge that the world as we know it is unraveling. People have lost



jobs, homes and loved ones in the unprecedented chaos of this pandemic. As many have observed, very old and enduring sufferings are getting a new level of recognition. The tattered threads of unraveling worlds are revealing the flaws in the social fabric in which our dominant culture was sewn.

A society stitched together with the worn-out materials of hatred, greed and brutal discrimination should not and will not have the final word. The stealing of Indigenous lands and decimation of cultures; the enslavement and dehumanization of whole peoples: these have catalyzed a legacy of trauma that must be faced with courageous honesty, if it is going to be transformed.

So how do I respond in this liminal moment? Liminal, in the sense of being in between what has been lost and what may be re-created. For me, it's been a need to stay with and pay attention to the void, to honor and surrender to it, to see where it leads. Yet, even as I write this, I struggle with the *how* of this. I want to begin by maintaining a non-defensive stance. My

hope is that I can offer a receptivity that is born of a broken heart that hears the cry of the poor and victimized. I spend time reading and searching out different perspectives than what my homogenized experience offered. I want to be willing to be awakened and converted by a different narrative than the one that has shaped the privileged life I have secured.

When I walk the labyrinth, I begin by



Since July 4th, we have been assembling 200-300 "To-go" meals three mornings a week in the backyard. Due to COVID-19, we do everything outside now: morning prayer, assembly, and distribution.

Blessing the Bomb

In this 75th year since the beginning of the nuclear age, we remember the witness and words of Father George Zabelka. He was a Catholic chaplain with the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II who served the airmen who firebombed Japan and dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and



FR. ZABELKA ON TINIAN ISLAND

Nagasaki in August, 1945.

The destruction of civilians in war was always forbidden by the Church, and if a soldier came to me and asked if he could put a bullet through a child's head, I would have told him, absolutely not. That would be mortally sinful. But in 1945 Tinian Island was the largest airfield in the world. Three planes a minute could take off from it around the clock. Many of these planes went to Japan with the express purpose of killing not one child or one civilian but of slaughtering hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of children and civilians—and I said nothing.

I remember one young man who was engaged in the bombings of Japanese cities. He was in the hospital on Tinian on the verge of a complete mental collapse. He told me that he had been on a low-level bombing mission, flying right down one of the main streets of a city, when straight ahead of him appeared a little boy, in the middle of the street, looking up at the plane in a childlike wonder. The man knew that in a few seconds the child would be burned to death by napalm which had already been released.

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Equally Sacred Priorities for Voters

101. Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. **Equally sacred**, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable, infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on

from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty.

102. We often hear it said that the situation of migrants is a lesser issue.

Some Catholics consider it a secondary issue compared to the grave bioethical questions. That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian, for whom the only proper attitude is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children.

by Pope Francis
from Gaudete et Exsultate, March 2018



(continued from front page)

To fail to speak to the utter moral corruption of the mass destruction of civilians was to fail as a Christian and a priest as I see it. Hiroshima and Nagasaki happened in and to a world and a Christian Church that had asked for it—that had prepared the moral consciousness of humanity to do and to justify the unthinkable.

As a Catholic chaplain I watched as the B-29, Bockscar, piloted by a good Irish Catholic pilot, dropped the bomb on Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki, the center of Catholicism in Japan. I knew that Catholic schools, churches, and religious orders were annihilated. And yet I said nothing.

I never preached a single sermon against killing civilians to the men who were doing it. I was brainwashed! It never entered my mind to protest publicly the consequences of these massive air raids. I was told it was necessary—told openly by the military and told implicitly by my Church’s leadership. (To the best of my knowledge no American cardinals or bishops were opposing these mass air raids. Silence in such matters is a stamp of approval.)

It seems a sign to me that 1700 years of Christian terror and slaughter should arrive at August 9, 1945 when Catholics dropped the Atomic Bomb on top of the largest and first Catholic city in Japan. One would have thought that I, as a Catholic priest, would have spoken out against the atomic bombing of nuns. One would have thought that I would have suggested that as a minimal standard of Catholic morality, Catholics shouldn’t bomb Catholic children. I didn’t. I, like that Catholic pilot of the Nagasaki plane, was heir to a Christianity that had for seventeen hundred years engaged in revenge, murder, torture, the pursuit of power and prerogative and violence, all in the name of our Lord. I

walked through the ruins of Nagasaki right after the war and visited the place where once stood the Urakami Cathedral. I picked up a piece of a censer from the rubble. When I look at it today I pray God forgives us for how we have distorted Christ’s teaching and destroyed His world by the distortion of that teaching. I was the Catholic chaplain who was there when this grotesque process begun with Constantine reached its lowest point—so far.

After the war, I worked with Martin Luther King, Jr., during the Civil Rights struggle in Flint, Michigan. His example and his words of nonviolent action, choosing love instead of hate, truth instead of lies, and nonviolence instead of violence, stirred me deeply. This brought me face to face with pacifism—active nonviolent resistance to evil. I recall his words after he was jailed in Montgomery, and this blew my mind. He said, “Blood may flow in the streets of Montgomery before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood that flows, and not that of the white man. We must not harm a single hair on the head of our white brothers.”

I struggled. I argued. But yes, there it was in the Sermon on the Mount, very clear: “Love your enemies. Return good for evil.” I went through a crisis of faith. Either accept what Christ said, as silly as it may seem, or deny him completely.



FR. ZABELKA AT URAKAMI CATHEDRAL

new leaf

by Robert Majors

*a place to sit underneath
growth that helps grow
sanctuary of shelter
ideas to consume
a change
it's time for a change
who permits this growth
a selfless worker
for the whole
it is free and connected
a stem from roots
light feeds it
directing its reach
catching water from the sky
guided to find use
understanding purpose
living and building
the essential
remember essence*



Robert Majors is building Conestoga Huts for the homeless, to learn more search online for: #foodnotbombslasvegas

We will be

CLOSED:

Nov. 26 - 28

PLEASE JOIN US:

COVID-19 Procedures:

Call or e-mail to schedule your volunteer morning. Please do not just show up. Do wear a mask. Visors, gloves and aprons provided. To Schedule: (702) 647-0728 or mail@lvcw.org

Thurs.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

Thurs.-Sat., 7:00 a.m.

“To-go” Meal served to 150-200 poor & homeless people.

Thursday, 10:30 a.m.:

50 lunches taken to the homeless.

Third Sat. of the month:

Deliver food boxes to homes in need.

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