

Remarks of Cardinal Robert McElroy at Peace Mass at Urakami Cathedral

August 9, 2025

On my first visit to Nagasaki three years ago, I was deeply moved by three moments. The first was my visit to the Twenty Six Martyrs Museum. The second was my visit to the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum. And the third was my visit here to Urakami Cathedral.

The Martyrs Museum conveyed to me the depth of Catholic faith among those who valued their faith so highly that they were willing to give up their lives in its defense. Their stories of courage and sacrifice, strength and love for Christ were and continue to be a vivid testimony of the ancient roots of the Church here in Japan, and the vitality of the Catholic community in this city which continues to this day. In walking their pilgrimage of suffering, they united themselves to Jesus Christ in an enduring and inspiring way that radiates grace to all of us who contemplate the love we have received in Jesus Christ.

The Atomic Bomb Museum spoke to me of the indefensible bombing which my own nation inflicted upon the people of Japan, and the power of nuclear weapons that haunts the modern world. The witness of these memorial days constitutes a siren call to the entire world to step away from the nuclear madness which threatens to engulf us through the pathway of modernization of existing nuclear weapon systems and the proliferation of weapons among new nations. The Hibakusha may be dwindling in numbers, but their heroic witness is the conscience of Japan to the world, reminding us of the dangers we are so blind to in the present moment.

But while my visit to the Martyrs Museum reminded me of the roots of the Church in Japan, and the Atomic Bomb Museum reminded me of the barbarism of which we as human beings are capable of at our worst, it was this Cathedral that had the most profound impact upon me. For it represented at its core pure and undiluted hope – the hope that does not forget or diminish the tragedies of the past, but finds in them chapters of grace

and love and courage. The decision to rebuild this Cathedral in this place, the sacrifices of the Catholic community which made that possible, and the reestablishment of a vibrant community of faith on this spot were for me a sign of God's triumph over every form of human suffering, and God's pledge to accompany us always, and especially closely in our times of greatest suffering. The flourishing and joy of this community and this place are overwhelming, especially today.

It strikes me that my three visits years ago point to the foundations for true peace in the world. The Martyr's Museum points to the need for true faith in God, who is the author and Prince of Peace. The Atomic Bomb Museum speaks to the need to recognize the tragic human failings that produce wars, inflame hatreds and inflict searing wounds. And the rebuilding of this great Cathedral points to overwhelming hope, which is sustaining star which guides us toward peace even when it seems farthest away. So in its essence, this local church of Nagasaki is profoundly a beacon to us all to remain faithful to the journey to peace to which the Lord called us in his first words after the Resurrection.

As I leave to return to the United States, I take with me new and piercing memories of faith, courage, compassion and joy. And for that great gift from you, Archbishop Nakamura, and the entire Church of Japan, I am immensely grateful. May the Lord bless you always.