

I Don't Know How to Apologize

It was late in the evening of August 3 when the mother of Kyoko came to see me with a request. A few days before the second year students had been mobilized. "Mother Ezumi, I was watching the B-29s come in over the city on a bombing raid the other day. I can't let Kyoko stay in the city any longer. Please let me take Kyoko back to the Goto Islands!"

My voice was firm as I replied, "Mrs. Matsumoto, Kyoko is now working for our country in the service of the army. She has been mobilized by the authorities. What will befall Japan if all the mobilized students run away for fear of the bombing. If I let Kyoko go home at this time of crisis, soon I would have to let all the others go one by one. As principal I cannot give you the permission to take her home, but should you remove her from the school...." At this she said, "I understand, Mother Ezumi, keep her here so that she can continue to work for our country."

I then reminded her that another of our girls, Shizuko Okabayashi, had died in a raid the other day. If Kyoko was to die in a raid, I would consider it as my fault, at which she said, "Be that as it may, Mother. It will be for the good. Let her stay and keep her working, please." And so she left, to return home without Kyoko. I didn't even have time to go to the gate with her.

On the fateful day of August 9, I was in the school alone. As I saw the flash of the explosion I began praying to our Blessed Mother. I fainted. On waking I found that from the waist down I was trapped under a fireproof wall. Try as I did, I could not move. I felt I could not bear the pain for much longer. Now sixteen years later, I feel I couldn't go through such pain again.

My sorrow at the death of those students who died is still too deep for words. I pray every day to our Lord through His Blessed Mother that He might have mercy on them and bring them to Himself in heaven where their tears will be wiped away and they will suffer no more.

With help and assistance from many, I was brought back from death's door. I remember being carried back to the shelter by one of our Sisters and there I lay seriously ill for many days while all around were unsure whether I would live or die. I know that with the dropping of the new bomb, the end of the war could not be far away. Japan was surely defeated.

Some of the Sisters who had been to Mitsuyama to collect wood resin, a substitute airplane fuel, returned and helped the wounded students, moving them to various homes and aid stations according to how much treatment was necessary. I was taken to Mr. Tagami's house at Koba where there were already some seventy others being treated. I tried all the time to keep in touch with how our students were, only to learn each day of more whose bodies had been found, or of those who had survived the initial impact only to die later of their wounds.

Kyoko Matsumoto wasn't found for many days but was presumed dead. Some forty six bodies had been removed from the factory and they were not all immediately identified because of the condition they were in. Kyoko was believed to have been within that group and so she was listed as dead. Her mother at first refused to believe that she was dead and went as far as Hakata to consult a fortune teller.

When I had recovered somewhat, I went with some of the ashes of the unidentified students to visit Kyoko's parents. They were staying on a boat in Ohato Harbor. They received me kindly and prepared a small meal for me, even though rice was in short supply. I found it hard to hold back the tears as I handed over the ashes. Kyoko had been their only daughter. Now they would have no one to comfort them in their old age. Many other parents also lost their only daughters that day.

The years have slipped by. Since then I've worked to rebuild Junshin High School as a memorial to those girls and the sacrifices they made, remembering them in my prayers every day. A special monument has been set up in the school grounds and dedicated to their memory, but sometimes I feel we still haven't done enough.

Heavenly Mother Mary, pray for those who died. May your Son be merciful to their families.

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