

A Hymn of Love

Sister Christina Tadako Tagawa, born in Shiroyama, Nagasaki City and brought up by pious parents, later became an aspirant of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, entering in 1938, having qualified as a kindergarten teacher. The following year she received the habit and the name "Christina" in ceremonies at the Oura Cathedral on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25. Then in 1941 she made her first vows as a member of the Congregation.

A bright and kind Sister, who often sang solos in the choir on feast days, she spent the next four years working in kindergartens attached to houses of the congregation in Io-jima, Kagoshima and Sasebo. In 1945 she came back to Nagasaki as a dormitory superintendent of Junshin High, from where she led and directed the mobilized students who were drafted with the escalation of hostilities in the course of that same year.

That day August 9 found her leading and encouraging her students who were working at the arms factory. The bomb destroyed the whole of the Urakami district in a flash, killing and wounding many. Sister Tagawa was numbered among the wounded and sent to the aid station at the Isahaya High School. Despite her own injuries she worked with the other wounded, ever conscious of their needs; she was like a mother to them.

Three days after the bombing, while inquiring after some Junshin girls at the aid station of Isahaya Girls' High School, a kind soldier informed me that there were some Junshin girls at a nearby school. When I arrived, many of them, though in severe pain and close to death, managed to greet me with a smile. And Sister Tagawa thanked me for coming and lightening her burden. She then passed out some pears I had brought with me before asking me to take charge while she took a little rest.

At the sound of the air raid alarm I went looking for Sister and found her resting by a water pipe. She was unable to move and begged me to leave her there. At the all clear I noticed her breathing was labored and her temperature was now 40 degrees, so I tried cooling her with water from the pipe. With no quiet place to go we passed the night propped up against some sandbags.

The following day the soldier, who would be my guide, came as I was passing out

rice cakes and tea to the students. On seeing Sister Tagawa's condition, he offered us the use of his house, but she declined, determined to stay with her students. And so she stayed with them for five days sharing their suffering and distress, at which time Tokunaga Sensei came and took her to his house, while also arranging the transfer of the Junshin girls to a new teachers' sanatorium near Isahaya. There they slept peacefully for the first time in many days as if back in their own dormitories at Junshin.

They all awoke the following morning in high spirits, briefly forgetting their pain as they took in the morning air and enjoyed the peace of the countryside. All ate their breakfast of rice and tea and then while Dr. Takeuchi made the rounds, the first examination by a doctor, they talked and chatted among themselves. Afterwards, they thanked the doctor, and often used to express their daily thanks in prayer and hymns.

Some five or six days later Sister Tagawa began to lose her appetite and Tokunaga Sensei helped to transfer her to the hospital as she became weaker and weaker. Some of her students also became weaker and their numbers diminished as they passed on to their heavenly reward.

On August 20, Sister Tagawa, who had previously ignored her own pain to be free to serve the students, began vomiting blood and running a high temperature, but she still did not complain. On hearing of the surrender she first asked whether it was true, and then expressed her willingness to offer her suffering that peace might come in God's good time. She also asked me to thank Dr. Takeuchi for all he had done in the way of treatment. She didn't feel she had the strength or the words to say it to him herself.

On August 25, she became critically ill and died later that day still trusting in God and placing her hope in Him as she sang:

Lord, thou gavest me my life
Thou hast chosen me.
Behold, I now come to Thee
To offer Thee my love.

Her life in its suffering had truly been a hymn to God and now surely echoed in heaven. She was followed in death, one by one, by the others; the sanatorium became quieter and quieter.

Sr. Euphrasy Uda