

On August 6, 1945 a B29 bomber dropped an Atom-bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Around 80,000 people died almost instantly, and another 130,000 died later from their wounds and radiation sickness. But just eight blocks away from ground zero – about a kilometer – there was a Catholic church staffed by German Jesuit priests who had been allowed to stay in the country during the war because Germany was an ally of Imperial Japan. The bomb obliterated the church building and all the other buildings of the area – except for the rectory in which the eight Jesuits were staying. Fr. Hubert Schiffer told what happened. As he was sitting down to a meal, “Suddenly a terrific explosion filled the air with one bursting thunder-strike. An invisible force lifted me from the chair, hurled me through the air, shook me, battered me, whirled me round and round like a leaf in a great autumn wind.” Fr. Schiffer says the next thing he knew he opened his eyes and he was lying on the ground. When he looked out on the world there was nothing standing in any direction.

But, in what is known as the Marian miracle of Hiroshima, these priests not only all survived the bomb, the most they suffered was a few cuts from flying window glass. Even more strange, none of them ever suffered from any radiation sickness. They lived to ripe old age. Scientists examined them repeatedly over the years but could not explain how these men walked away from an Atom-bomb.

A similar thing happened three days later, on August 9, 1945, in Nagasaki, when the second atom-bomb was dropped. In the 1930s St. Maximilian Kolbe had established a friary of Franciscan friars in the city. He called the religious house "The Garden of the Immaculate." When the second bomb fell on this city the Friary was left standing – just as the Jesuit rectory had been in Hiroshima. And, again, the friars there escaped injury. There seems no reasonable explanation. But the clerics in both cities had the same conviction. Both groups were devoted the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and to praying the Rosary every day according to the words of Mary at Fatima. Both the Jesuits and

Franciscans attributed their miraculous survival to the protection and intercession of Mary.

Today is the feast of Mary, Mother of God. The point of this feast is to remind us of the importance of Mary as the Mother of our God and Savior, Jesus. We are always called to imitate Jesus – and one of the ways we do that is by trusting Mary with our own protection, just as Jesus did. Who could be more vulnerable than an embryo – or fetus? Yet Jesus entrusted Himself at those stages of His life to Mary's womb. And later, as a child, Mary must have watched over Him and protected Him just as any mother watches over her child.

We are sometimes asked, "Why turn to Mary when we could turn to God instead for our protection?" But it's not either/or. Of course, we pray for God's protection. In Jesus' own life the Heavenly Father would send His angels to speak to Mary and Joseph – and warn Joseph about the dangers to the child Jesus. But Mary and Joseph were also used by God as protectors of the young Savior.

We may think Mary as a gentle woman – and she was. But I also think of her as a Mama-bear – like all Moms. Mothers protect their young. And we are Mary’s sons and daughters. In the Gospel of John, chapter 19, at the foot of the cross as Jesus is dying, Christ says to Mary and St. John the Evangelist, “Woman behold you son.” Then He said to His disciple, “Behold your mother.” Catholics have always interpreted Jesus to include, not just the single man John, but all of us in those words. Jesus has handed us all over to Mary to be her children – just as Jesus is our brother.

On this feast-day of Mary the Mother of God we should remember we can have that gentle Mama-bear beside us. We also have the ability to call upon the Mother of God to protect us. Or as the Catholic phrase has it, “To cast her mantle over us.” Her mantle is the cloak-like garment women of ancient Israel would wear. Imagine as a child hiding under your Mom’s coat or blanket. It makes a lot of psychological sense. That is how we think as children.

I believe that is what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Those priests escaped the horrible blasts because Mary's mantle was over them. Those, of course, were miraculous examples of Mary's intercession and protection – going beyond the ordinary. We don't know why miracles happen when, and as, they do. But, by definition, they're very rare. Not all Catholics, not all good people, in those Japanese cities were physically saved. God's ways are mysterious. But those priests were convinced that Mary had a hand in their coming out unharmed from the worst violence of a violent century. I think we should listen to their intuitions.

Do we ever ask for Mary's prayers and protection? Do we explicitly ask her to throw her mantle over us? Her Son Jesus has given her to us, and us to her, for that very purpose. The Mother of God is our mother. Wow! Let us turn to her regularly and with the trust children have in their mom's strength. If the Father in heaven trusted

his Son's life to Mary, why shouldn't we trust her just as much with our own protection?