

Miracles

I had been watching the track of typhoon Haiyan for a couple of days before it crossed the Philippines. The accuracy of computer modelling provided a pretty clear indication of the pathway of the storm as it moved west across the Pacific Ocean towards the coast of the island nation. This information, updated every few hours on the HK Observatory website, indicated that this was one of the largest storms ever recorded and that the impact on the areas that it passed over would likely be catastrophic. I remember thinking how fortunate it was that firstly it would not pass directly over the capital city, Manila, and secondly that it was then due to head due west across the South China Sea rather than track north west towards Hong Kong.

The first news reports out of the Philippines suggested that the impact of the storm on the central islands had been less than expected and that there were few reported cases of loss of life or serious injury. As we now know, such reports were ill-informed and totally inaccurate. Yes, Manila had escaped the full fury of the typhoon Haiyan but the news that gradually emerged from districts further to the south painted a very different picture. Television commentators, who had spoken in the first hours of the storm's passing about the miracle 'that so few had died' now talked about the miracle 'that not more people had been killed' given the severity of the typhoon. Time will tell what the final death toll shall be although one death is one too many and devastating for the family involved.

Father Philip has selected 'the miracles of Jesus' as the theme for assembly this week. The word 'miracle' is an interesting word that is open to all kinds of interpretation. A miracle is defined as an event that has nothing to do with human intervention. It is an event or occurrence that has arisen due to the intervention of a supernatural body often related to a deity. Christians will talk about the miracles of Jesus; Buddhists will speak of the divine intervention of the Gods; while Moslems will recount stories of the works of Holy Men.

Examples of miracles are contained in the pages of the Christian Bible, in many Buddhist Holy scripts and the Islāmic Qur'an. As these examples had been written in these texts they are often seen as the truth and as such are to be believed. No matter the religion, to many believers a miracle written in a

sacred work actually did happen. As a result, we thank God for the divine intervention.

Others would say that stories of miracles were never intended to be taken literally. Rather, the stories were a means for people to think more deeply about life and God. I am sure that this is something that the Reverend Murphy and your Religious Studies teachers will discuss with you in due course.

Sometimes we use the word miracle to relate to an event we believe will not happen. You might tell yourself that it would be a miracle if you were to perform brilliantly in the upcoming mid-year examinations. Of course, your result has nothing to do with the intervention of God but rather more to do with your attitude and determination to do well. I do not think that your class-teacher would accept the argument that a poor examination result had more to do with God's failure to step in and help rather than on your lack of revision.

On other occasions we use the word miracle in examples of coincidence or good fortune. I remember the case of a European woman who fell whilst cleaning the windows of her sixth floor apartment only to land in the swimming pool. Also, the tale of a fisherman stranded for days on a rocky outcrop in the ocean with no food and little fresh water only to be spotted by the crew of a passing cargo ship that was itself on the wrong course due to a broken navigation system. Or the man who suffered a massive heart attack on a flight from London to New York who just happened to be sitting next to a world-famous heart surgeon. In each case, I expect that they, their families and friends would say that they were still alive today because of a miracle.

In a devoutly Christian country like the Philippines I am sure that there will be many examples of survival to be reported in the newspapers and on television in the days and weeks ahead. For the majority, however, their hopes will centre on the finding of loved ones who were lost in the storm and praying for a miracle that they will come home safely.

Dr. J.R. Kennard