

Scripture Readings and Homily for the Mass of Accession of Most Reverend TARCISIUS KIKUCHI ISAO as Archbishop of Tokyo

St Mary's Cathedral, Tokyo, December 16, 2017

The Epistle of St Paul to the Romans (12:2-10)

(1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.) 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what good and acceptable and perfect.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace give to us; prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

The Holy Gospel according to John (1:1-18)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the

darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of all the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'" 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Homily

These words from the beginning of John's Gospel have just been read: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light" (Jn 1:6,8). John the Baptist himself was not the light, but was a witness to the light. This is also the mission of our Church in Japan today. I feel that it is our mission to carry on the mission of John the Baptist. We ourselves are not the light. We receive the light and we should witness to the light.

Let us reflect again what the evangelizing mission of the Church in Japan should be.

It has been 468 years since St Francis Xavier brought the Gospel to Japan in 1549. Many excellent and outstanding missionaries of the Gospel have dedicated themselves to the mission of evangelizing Japan. However, I feel that the present

situation of Japan still has a long way to go. I think we are still at the stage where the Old Testament becomes the New Testament. Surely, at this present time, don't we need to carry on the role of John the Baptist and give careful and sincere witness to the Gospel of joy which is Jesus?

In 1987 the Catholic Church of Japan held what was called The National Incentive Convention for Evangelization (NICE-1) and adopted as its aim: "building an open Church." "To whom should the Church be open?" you may ask. It is to the poor and the powerless in society.

The Lord Jesus became the friend and companion of people who were regarded as sinners, people who were despised, people suffering from illnesses and handicaps, people who were discriminated against. We want to learn from Jesus how to be a Church which is friendly to those who are aware of their weakness and sinfulness. We want to be a community which welcomes and offers solace to the physically and psychically ill and those who suffer from various disabilities. We want to befriend and encourage people who wander about in darkness and have lost sight of any purpose in life. Many people are so lonesome they can no longer see any reason for living. Everyone would like to enjoy human relations in which they are respected and treated as meaningful.

It is painful to hear people say that they hesitate to set foot in a church, or that they went once but no one paid any attention to them. We want to be a church community that can be seen as open for anyone to enter and feel welcome.

People are truly looking for salvation, which can be seen in actual statistics, in the statistics of those who take their own life. The actual cause of death among young people in Japanese society today is something we must take to heart. Statistics show that suicide is the major cause of death among people from 15 to 39 years of age. This is a very sad and regrettable situation. How should we religious people respond to this problem? In order to improve the situation, the Catholic Church in Japan must exert all its effort and offer its prayers for this purpose.

So our mission as Church, is to show forth the light of Christ that we have received and become the body of Christ enlivened by the Holy Spirit. There are many members in the body of Christ, each with a different function. All of these are brought together into the one work of Christ. In today's first reading, the Apostle Paul gave us a surprising admonition: "Love one another with mutual

affection; outdo one another in showing honor.” (Rom 12:10) How is this admonition carried out among us? Don’t we rather point out failings and belittle one another? I hope we shall rather esteem one another’s strengths and merits, acknowledge each person’s role and ministry, and respect one another.

In fact, it is not easy to put these words of St Paul into practice. As he had previously declared in his first letter to the Corinthians, there were divisions and confrontations in the church of Corinth (1 Cor 1:10-17). The gospels, too, tell us that even the 12 disciples were quite concerned about who was the greatest among them (Mk 9:33-37, Mt 13:1-5, Lk 9:45-48). On the other hand, we are also told that people outside the church, on seeing the first generations of Christians, said in admiration, “See how they love one another!” This surely shows that the following words from the Gospel of John were put into practice: “Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:34-35). The Church grew and expanded thanks to the witness given by Christians through their love.

If people who suffer and find it difficult to live in this tempestuous society of present-day Japan can see us living in close companionship, helping and loving and forgiving one another, perhaps that could be called our greatest evangelizing mission.

Most merciful Jesus, pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here today, and grant us the grace to learn from you how to show forth the mercy of God in our daily life. Amen.

Homily for the Confirmation at Umeda Church

15 November 2015, 33rd Sunday in ordinary time

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

Today, we are celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Chapel of Umeda Church.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is given to those who are already baptized. Confirmation is the sacrament which perfects baptismal grace. It is the sacrament which gives us the seven spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, and the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God's presence. You are going to receive these spiritual gifts through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, by the laying on of hands, and through the words: Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will bring you closer to Christ, strengthen your bond with the Church and will make you more ready to be part of the mission of the Church. When you receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, you will be gifted with the special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and proclaim the name of Christ boldly as apostles.

Dear friends,

Today we also celebrate the 4th Sunday of Easter. The Gospel just now proclaimed is from chapter 10 of John.

The theme is: "Jesus is our good shepherd."

Really Jesus is our good shepherd. He says that he knows his own sheep. Jesus knows everyone of us and he always protects us and leads us to the spring of eternal life. Although we cannot see the Risen Christ with our own eyes, we know and believe that the Risen Christ is always with us, he always stays in our church by means of the mission of the Holy Spirit.

Really Jesus is our good shepherd. He laid down his life for his sheep. The death on the Cross shows us his tremendous love to give each one of us eternal life.

So let us meditate on this deep love, this merciful love, this generous but powerful love of the Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

International Mass 2015

27 September 2015

Tokyo Cathedral

26th Sunday, Day for Migrants, Refugees, and People on the Move

1st Reading: Numbers 11:25-29

2nd Reading: James 5:1-6

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

In today's Gospel, Jesus criticizes the narrow sectarianism of the disciples.

John says to Jesus: "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." Jesus answers: "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:38-40).

Here the "name" means Jesus' name. To cast out demons by using his name is to win over the power of evil by the power of the Holy Spirit. John says "he was not following us," but the one who did not follow drove out demons not by the power of the disciples but by the power of Jesus. Therefore it does not make sense for them to try to stop the man. Maybe they feared a loss of control because they felt he was encroaching on their power.

Jesus' idea is different. He criticizes the disciples' narrow and exclusive sectarianism when he says: "Whoever is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:40)

In today's first reading, Joshua son of Nun is jealous of the fact that the Spirit given to Moses is also given to the seventy elders. Joshua, too, is anxious to monopolize the gift like John and the others.

What Jesus intends to say here is to "be generous because God is generous." God's work, the operation of the Holy Spirit, is not confined by space or time. It goes on among the various sects of Christian churches and other religions as well,

and even among those who think themselves to be unbelievers.

We need to appreciate willingly all the good things, beautiful things, and the truths that can be seen outside our Church. We must respect the right of the freedom of faith of those whose understanding of faith is different from that of ours.

The Catholic Church in this respect must reflect on her attitudes seriously. It is true that there were periods in the history of the Church when they thought they had to respect the freedom of faith.

However, it was only at Vatican II that the Church arrived at the present understanding of the basic human rights concerning the freedom of faith. Namely, we came to affirm our realization that “we must be open about other people’s faiths and that the freedom of faith belongs to the important and basic human rights.”

Japan is a country with many religions. Here, we need to go beyond the differences of religions and religious organizations and respect each other’s positions in order to work together for peace, life and human dignity, and to work against the power of evil.

Today is the day for “Migrants, Refugees, and People on the Move.” At present so many people are in circumstances where they are obliged to become refugees or migrants. Their afflictions surpass our imagination. The Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, were also refugees. For us Christians, it is a matter of course that we share our wealth, assets, and money with those in trouble. We must go beyond the differences of our creeds, nationalities, cultures, languages, and practices and mutually share the good things and put our forces together so as to destroy the evil that entraps human beings. Let us ask for God’s help and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let us offer our heartfelt thanks for the gifts given and praise the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Blessed be the Lord Jesus who became a human being like us!

Now I would like to take this opportunity to make a special request. From October 26th to 28th there is going to be a Priests’ Assembly at the Cathedral. Every priest working in the Tokyo diocese is strongly urged to attend it. The priests working at CTIC and the priests who are involved in the activities of CTIC, please be sure to come and discuss how to improve the future of CTIC. Thank you.

Homily for the Mass celebrating the Ten Days Appeal for Peace

August 8, 2015 at St. Mary's
Cathedral, Tokyo

First Reading: The book of Isaiah 48:17-18

Second Reading: letter to the Ephesians 2/16-22

Gospel: Mathew 5□1-10

In the sermon the mount, Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God." (Am. Bible Mathew 5□9) Being a peace maker is not only the responsibility of every Christian, but also of all the people on earth.

There are two phrases that always come to my mind whenever I think of peace.

The first is the "defences of peace". This is a famous phrase that appears in the introductory paragraph of the UNESCO constitution: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed; That ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war." (1949)

What are the causes of war? Poverty, discrimination, and disparity can be thought of as the cause of anxiety, fear, hatred, and hostility. These may have tendency to cause deep wounds in people's hearts and trigger war. It is an absolute necessity to work towards eliminating these negative tendencies that cause war.

In this connection, the introductory paragraph of the Japanese constitution left a deep impression on me.

"We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time and are deeply conscious of

the high ideals controlling human relationship, and we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world.”

We have to realize this “determination” at all cost. For this reason, Japan has forever renounced the use of force. This is indeed the important testimony that we have realized the “defence of peace” in our hearts.

The second phrase that I recall is “disarmament of heart”. This phrase appears in the proclamation of the Japanese Catholic Bishops celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, “The Resolution for Peace”.

“The peace we seek is based on the reconciliation between man and God, which in turn is based on Jesus’ cross and resurrection. As believers, our approach to peace must have Christ in the center. Only by being one with Christ, and with His support and leadership, would we obtain peace. In the occasion of the last supper, Christ established the celebration of the Mass by wishing that “all of us become one”. Through the Mass, Christ shines upon those of us who march towards the realization of peace, and gives us strength to reach the goal. □□□ To us humans, who are disunited with hatred caused by our sin - Christ brings fire of love and leads us to the ‘disarmament of heart’. He heals our wounded hearts, brings oneness among peoples, and creates inner foundation for the everlasting peace.” (cited from “The Resolution for Peace”)

It is important to cherish the phrase the “disarmament of heart”.

Today’s second reading is from the Letter to the Ephesians. “For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, □□□through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”(Ephesians2□14-17)

Christians are taught not to combat evil with evil, but to defeat evil with good. The article 9 of the Japanese Constitution is exactly in accord with this teaching. Japanese people are determined to renounce war as a method to settle any international dispute, and also not to retain any fighting power. Because of the article 9 of the Constitution, the Japanese people have not killed anyone nor gotten killed, in any war during the past 70 years.

We are all children of same God - and should learn together and pray together. To accomplish these, we have to: “commune with each other; help each other; and understand each other”.(from“[The Resolution for Peace](#)”)

To build up the “defence of peace” and cause the “disarmament of heart”, some preparation is necessary. It is important to prepare a right atmosphere. Not just by prayer, but we must act in accordance with our prayers, we have to ferment the right atmosphere.

This year’s “Prayer for Peace 2015” shows us Christian daily goals that point toward the world peace. We must rely on God’s help, and work diligently to attain these daily goals, as children of God.

[Homily for the feast of Saint Mark, Evangelist](#)

25 April 2015,at Akabane Church

Gospel Mark16/14-18

14 Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. 15 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

Homily

As we celebrate the feast of Saint Mark, the Evangelist, today's Gospel reading is taken from the epilogue of the Mark's Gospel.

I am somewhat awkward to give a homily on this part of the Gospel.

Mark says: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." Of course, we are expected to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations. But what does it mean to proclaim the gospel to all the creatures? I think the whole of creation is waiting for its redemption. Apostle Paul says that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay, and obtain the glorious liberty given to all the children of God.

Then Mark says: "16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Does this verse mean that those who did not have a chance to know Jesus must go to hell? No! Vatican II says that, the merciful God lets everyone share the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

"17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

How should we interpret these passages? Should we accept them literally? I think these phrases mean that, we shall be able to overcome every evil when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again. In the Lord's prayer. We pray every day, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"

Also, in mass, the priest continues to pray:

"Deliver us Lord, we pray, from every evil,
Graciously grant peace in our day,
That, by the help of your mercy,
We may be always free from sin
And safe from all distress,
As we await the blessed hope
And the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ."

The mission of the Church is evangelization. At the end of the Gospel, Mark indicates two tasks of our church.

1. To proclaim the Gospel.
2. To get over every evil.

Therefore, we should fight to conquer every evil, and to do our best to make peace in this world. As Jesus says:

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew (5:9)

On February 25, 2015, in the occasion of the 70th year after the Second World War, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan issued a message on peace entitled:

“Blessed are the peacemakers - Now especially, peace must not depend upon weapons”

I ask you to read it. English translation is available.

Today I just quote its conclusion:

“In Conclusion, we recall the words of Pope John Paul II in his Appeal for Peace in Hiroshima: “Peace must always be the aim: peace pursued and protected in all circumstances. Let us not repeat the past, a past of violence and destruction. Let us embark upon the steep and difficult path of peace, the only path that befits human dignity, the only path that leads to the true fulfillment of the human destiny, the only path to a future in which equity, justice and solidarity are realities and not just distant dreams.”[8]

We are encouraged by the words of Jesus Christ, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt. 5:9). Seventy years after the end of the war and 50 years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, let us renew our determination to seek peace and to work for peace. We Catholics in Japan are small in number, but in union with other Christians and along with believers of other religions and those throughout the world who wish for peace, we renew our commitment to work to make peace a reality. “

Letter from Archbishop Okada at the closure of the Year of Faith

Nov 24, 2013

Dear people of Tokyo diocese,

The Year of Faith that started on October 11, 2012 comes to its last day on the feast of Christ the King, November 24, 2013.

Pope Benedict XVI in his Motu Proprio The Door of Faith exhorted us to learn from Christ “on whom our faith depends from start to finish” (cf. Hebrews 12:2). The life of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion and example for the lifestyle of every believer.

When we came close to the Year of Faith I sent Approaching the Year of Faith (letter of the Archbishop) to you all and asked you to exert yourself wholeheartedly to realize the following five items:

1. To know Jesus Christ more deeply
2. To study Vatican II and learn the Catechism of the Catholic Church
3. To study the Creed
4. To [celebrate] the liturgy and sacraments, [to do] daily prayer and meditation
5. To witness the love of faith.

Dear all of you, I ask you to now read Approaching the Year of Faith once more, and to give some quiet time to reflect on how you have lived this year.

The Gospel of the feast of Christ the King (Lk 23:35-43) tells us about Jesus who is ridiculed, scorned and despised. Above Jesus' cross an inscription was affixed that read: "This is the King of the Jews." The soldiers jeered: "If you're King of the Jews, save yourself." (Lk 23:37)

Here "Christ the King" is described as attaining his miserable end. In the first reading of today, David comes on the scene who had been Juda's and Israel's king for 40 years. David has been the ideal of a king. The Gospel speaks about Jesus Christ being king in a way opposite to that of David.

The death of this Jesus redeemed us, it was a death to bring us the forgiveness of sin. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us, and while putting into practice his own teaching he ended his life on earth. Jesus' life has been one of offering himself in order to express the love of God his Father who forgives the sinner and saves the sinner. We, disciples of Jesus, have to endure the trials our Lord has suffered. That means to love those who persecute us, who disdain us, and to ask good things for these people.

To love the sinner does not mean to ignore sin. Sin is sin, evil is evil. To love a person who has sinned signifies to suffer for that sinner. The apostle Paul says: "Do not repay anyone evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all." (Ro 12:17) "Love does no evil to the neighbor." (Ro 13:10)

The problem of why sin and evil exist in this world, which God has created, troubles us. Before the absurdities of the world we shrink back. Faith precisely believes and lives God's love in a world where evil exists. Life is a journey with continuous trials, a ongoing fight with evil.

Jesus taught us the Our Father. The Lord's Prayer is said to be the summary of the Gospel. Jesus is teaching us to struggle with evil, and to pray for that purpose: "And deliver us from evil."

The original Greek word for 'evil' can also be translated as 'evil spirits'. It means that our fight is a fight with 'evil / evil spirits'. When reading the letter to the Christians of Ephesus, we are told as follows:

"Draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor

of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities. With the powers. With the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.” (Eph 6:10-12)

The fight with evil is a fight with the structural evil / social evil that exists in this world. While learning the Church’s social doctrine, we must not omit to make our utmost efforts to establish justice and peace on earth. I would like that you now reflect once on what kind of effort you have made to evangelize society, and on what efforts you’ve made to realize the priority objectives of Tokyo diocese.

I pray that Christ the Lord may bless you all as “children of the light” (Eph 5:8), that He may sustain, illuminate and support you.

November 24, 2013 on the Feast of Christ the King

□Peter Takeo Okada

Archbishop of Tokyo

P.S.: In connection with the Year of Faith I recommend a prayer, said to be from Mother Teresa, which I think is very good for imitating the life of our Lord Jesus.

O Jesus, free me from my wanting to be appreciated and to be loved,

O Jesus, free me from my wanting to be respected and to be honored.

O Jesus, free me from my fear to be despised.

O Jesus, free me from my fear to be looked down upon and to be rebuked,
from my fear to be slandered and to be misunderstood,
somehow free me, Lord. Amen.

Homily for the Pentecost Sunday Confirmation Mass

19 May 2013 at St. Mary's Cathedral, Tokyo

First Reading: Acts 2:1-11

Second Reading: Romans 8:8-17

Gospel: John 14:15-16, 23b-26

Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always. Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. Yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

The risen Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples for forty days, manifesting that he was alive. Then on the fortieth day he was lifted up to heaven and was no longer visible. At that time he said, "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

This is strange talk, indeed. Don't you see a contradiction in these words spoken

by Jesus when he was about to depart from this world? Doesn't the word "depart" mean "not be together anymore"? Indeed, the physical body of Jesus departed toward the world of eternity, which cannot be seen by us on the earth.

Jesus of Nazareth spent little more than thirty years on this earth. He could only meet people of a certain time and place. However, by giving his Holy Spirit to us after leaving this world, Jesus has become able to meet anyone, anywhere, at any time. It was by the sending of the Holy Spirit that our encounter with Jesus became possible, and through this gift he fulfilled his promise, "I am with you always, until the end of the age."

The Holy Spirit is truly the Spirit of God the Father and the Spirit of Jesus. He is the life, the power, and the love of God.

Today's Gospel of John says that the Holy Spirit is the "Advocate." "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17). "The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit is an advocate who will guide and encourage us to spread Jesus' teachings truthfully and earnestly. He will also invite us to live according to the words of Jesus with wisdom and courage.

The promise of Jesus was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, and it is on this day that the Church was born. The Holy Spirit remains within the Church and within us even now, continuing to enlighten us.

Many people today are waiting for the Good News of the Gospel. We have all received the vocation to spread the Gospel to those waiting for this good news. All of you who will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation today can, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, be strong and courageous in professing your faith. Pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance.

Let us pray to the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit our Lord, make us true disciples in spreading the Gospel. Come and free us from deception, doubt, fear, hesitation, prejudice, and hatred. Guide us to spread the Gospel with the peace of Our Lord. Give us the grace to be strong in

our faith, and guide us to live our daily life in hope and love. Amen.

Homily for the Third Sunday of Easter at Kanda Church

14 April 2013

First Reading: Acts 5:27b-32, 40b-41

Second Reading: Revelation 5:11-14

Gospel: John 21: 1-19

(text)

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea.

The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some

of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord.

Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted, but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Kanda Parish! Happy Easter !

Since you have a new pastor, I wanted to come and give you my personal greetings, and like on a sudden inspiration, I am visiting Kanda Church today. Later I will talk more with you.

Today, let's take up the last part of the Gospel. The risen Christ asked Peter three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (21:15) "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (21:16) "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (21:17)

Peter was sad on being questioned the same way three times. We may think that

the reason why Jesus persisted in asking three times reflects the fact that Peter had said three times that he didn't know Jesus, thus denying his relationship with him. This incident of denial remained very deep in Peter's heart. To put it in modern-day language, wasn't it something like a "trauma" for him? Peter then answered from the depth of his heart: "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." (21:17)

When Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" the original Greek word for "love" in the Gospel is "agapas." This is a verb, and the noun form is the well-known "agape." Generally, the word for "love" in the New Testament is "agape." However, the word in Peter's answer was "phileo." This also means "I love," but it is a word that represents the fraternal friendship between humans.

Jesus' first and second questions used "agapas," but both times Peter answered saying "phileo." The third time Jesus used the word "phileis" instead of "agapas." "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (21:17). Here I feel the tenderness of Jesus. When the Love-Agape of God is transmitted to human beings, it also becomes human Love-Philia (1). Jesus loved his disciples with his human heart, with a warm love that passes through the human blood. Jesus as a man loved Peter with a human heart.

Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my lambs." (21:15) "Tend my sheep." (21:16) "Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted, but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (21:17-18)

Jesus commanded Peter to take care of his sheep. The Good Shepherd is ready to sacrifice his life for his sheep. Ezekiel, the Old Testament prophet denouncing bad shepherds speaks as follows: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been pasturing themselves! Should not shepherds, rather, pasture sheep?" (Ezekiel 34.2)

Good shepherds pasture the flock. Bad shepherds feed themselves, that is to say they "exploit the sheep to their own advantage." The good shepherd heals and comforts the sick, encourages those in doubt, strengthens the weak, shows hope to those who are disappointed.

What the shepherds of the Church of Jesus Christ must do more than anything is

to lead to an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus all people who are depressed and people who are lost. They must teach and encourage them to obtain strength and light from Christ.

Peter answered with love to the call of Jesus “Feed my sheep,” and was martyred on Vatican Hill in Rome (2). The successor of Peter is the bishop of Rome. The new bishop of Rome, Pope Francis himself, shows by his example that a shepherd should be a shepherd for poor people, for people who suffer and are in trouble, who are despised and discriminated against, for people who suffer in loneliness.

Let us pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that our Tokyo Archdiocese may be an oasis for people who suffer and are in trouble amid the wilderness of this modern age.

Notes:

(1) The word “Philia” for love, is usually translated as “friendship” or “affection”

(2) The hill in the northwest of Rome, over the right bank of the Tiber River, is referred to as the “Vatican.” On this hill the tomb of the Apostle Peter was erected. Here a basilica to commemorate Peter, “St Peter’s Basilica,” was built by Constantine, the emperor who officially recognized Christianity. It is said that later this place became the residence of the Popes, the bishops of Rome and successors of St Peter. There they lived, had their office, and did pastoral work. Also the name “Vatican” given to the Holy See is derived from the place name of this “Vatican Hill.”

[Homily for the Confirmation at the](#)

Franciscan Chapel Center

7 April 2013

First Reading: Acts 5:12-16

Second Reading: Rev 1/9-11,12-13,17-19

Gospel: John 20: 19 - 31

(text)

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not

written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

Dear brothers and sisters, Happy Easter!

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Easter, which we also call Divine Mercy Sunday, and during this Mass you will receive the sacrament of Confirmation.

We have just heard words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ according to the gospel of John. For me, the most impressive part of what Jesus said is the words:

“Peace be with you.”

He repeated these words three times. I think this fact is very important. Perhaps that is why the priest during Mass, just before Holy Communion, says to everyone:

“The peace of the Lord be with you always.”

When Jesus was crucified and killed, the disciples were not only disappointed and discouraged, they were also frightened, and they ran away. They were afraid of the Jewish leaders. They also were sorry and ashamed because they had disowned their Master. With fear and remorse they came together in a house, and shut the door tightly.

Then Jesus came in, even though the door was locked, and said to them:

“Peace be with you.”

The voice of Jesus was salvation and relief for them. They saw the Lord, they were glad, they rejoiced, because they felt they were forgiven and accepted by their Lord Jesus. Jesus forgave their sins.

The Gospel says:

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the

Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The disciples received the Holy Spirit, and with the power of the Holy Spirit they could give people forgiveness for their sins. And so just two weeks ago, the priest who had received that power could forgive your sins in your first confession.

That is the way that the apostle John tells us about Pentecost, the day when the apostles received the Holy Spirit as the Lord had promised. At the same time they also received the power to give the Holy Spirit to other people, and so complete the work of baptism.

Bishops are successors of the apostles, and have this power of giving the Holy Spirit to people who have been baptized. And so now, as the bishop of Tokyo, I am going to give you the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation.

You have already been baptized into Christ, and when I pray for you and make the sign of the cross on your forehead with holy oil, you will receive the power of his Spirit

The power of the Holy Spirit will help you to imitate Jesus. So you must try to be active members of the Church, alive in Jesus Christ. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit give your life completely in the service of everyone, especially in the service of the poor, of the sick, of the lonely, of people whom others look down upon, or discriminate against. This is what Christ did; he came not to be served but to serve.

So, before you receive Confirmation, I ask you to renew the profession of faith you made in baptism.

Homily for the Mass in memory of Archbishop Oscar Romero

24 March 2013 at St. Mary's Cathedral, Tokyo

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus,

Today, Passion Sunday, we commemorate the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem, his Passion and his Death on the Cross.

Today, here in the Tokyo Cathedral, we also commemorate the violent death of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated on 24 March, 1980.

Archbishop Romero lived as his Lord Jesus lived, in obedience to his Father's will. He loved and protected the poor and oppressed, and for this reason he was killed, just as Jesus Christ was crucified out of love for us.

As a successor of the apostles, every bishop is expected to protect and serve his people, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment based on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

Today's Gospel according to Luke tells us in detail how Jesus was crucified.

He taught us to love our enemies and he put his teaching into practice by praying for those who persecuted him and were putting him to death. Jesus offered his life for us, for our salvation, for our redemption from sin.

Jesus said: "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing." (23:4)

We also read the following passage:

The people stood by and watched. The rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God." (23:35)

And one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." (23:36)

But Jesus did nothing for himself. He did not use his power for himself.

St. Paul says in today's second reading, the letter to the Philippians.

(Christ), though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. (2:6-8).

Archbishop Romero was shot to death just when he was elevating the chalice during Mass. His death was the death of a Martyr. He is a witness to God's love for the poorest, the weakest, the least important.

Let us pray that we may believe more deeply in the love of God and put it into practice through the intercession of the Servant of God, Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Amen.

On Entering the “Year of Faith”

(Letter from Archbishop Okada)

Sep 30, 2012

To all Catholics of the Archdiocese of Tokyo,

May the peace of the Lord be with you all!

Pope Benedict XVI, in order to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th anniversary of the promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, has proclaimed a “Year of Faith” starting from October 11, 2012, and lasting until November 24, 2013. (1)

As we approach the “Year of Faith,” I have on many occasions appealed to all in the Archdiocese of Tokyo to confirm their faith, deepen it, bear testimony to it, and transmit it in their surroundings. Today once again, bearing in mind the priorities of the Archdiocese (2), I would like to ask all of you to make a renewed effort with regard to the following matters.

1. To know Jesus Christ more deeply.

The most important aim of this Year of Faith is to come to a deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2), “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). (Porta Fidei 13)

Jesus is the supreme leader of our faith. By his death on the cross Jesus of

Nazareth fulfilled his faith in God the Father. Jesus' life delineated in the Gospels has fully revealed the "model of faith that has characterized the history of our salvation over a span of two thousand years" (Porta Fidei 13). Let's learn how to deepen our faith through the words and life of Jesus Christ.

It goes without saying that what is most important in order to learn from the words and life of Jesus Christ is to study and relish the four Gospels. The Gospels are always read at Mass, so please study and appreciate the gospel of each Sunday's Mass. The homily interprets the Gospel which has been read, connects it with our daily life and contemporary society, and encourages believers to live every day according to their faith.

The Sunday Mass also has two additional readings. The first reading in many cases is taken from the Old Testament. The Old Testament describes the history of salvation before Jesus Christ and points in advance to the coming of the Savior. The second reading is from the letters of the Apostle Paul or others, and shows how the primitive church understood the words and life of Jesus Christ. Becoming familiar with the content of these two readings also helps us acquire a better understanding of the day's Gospel.

2. To study the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Let's study the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which now marks its 50th anniversary. First, consider why the Council was summoned and the intent and purpose of that great meeting of all the bishops of the world. Try to understand also how the Second Vatican Council reformed the Church. I earnestly desire that in each parish, each religious house, as well as in various groups, opportunities should be provided to learn about the Second Vatican Council. (3)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a new compilation based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. It was issued exactly twenty years ago. It will be very beneficial to learn about the authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church as renewed by the Council. As a text, you can also use the Compendium of

the Catechism of the Catholic Church. You can also consider reading especially those parts that have been reformed by the Council. I truly recommend the study of the Catechism. (4)

3. To study the Creed.

I recommend that we also re-study the meaning of the Creed that we always recite during the Mass on Sundays and Feasts of Obligation.

The Creed is a “Profession of Faith” which briefly summarizes the common understanding of the faith established by the ancient Church. It is the heritage of our faith that we continue to recite as a prayer.

The Creed begins with the words “I believe” (Credo) and is recited during Mass as a declaration of the faith of the community. For over two thousand years the Church has recited this common profession of community faith. When we recite the Creed, we assert what we believe, whom we believe in, and how we believe. The proclamation of the Creed has the effect of deepening our faith. The explanation of the Creed given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church leads us to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the faith of the ancient Church.

How to express the understanding of the faith of the ancient Church and how to transmit it in modern Japan are important challenges. I hope that we may all continue to study and do research in this matter.

4. Liturgy and Sacraments / daily prayer and meditation.

The Church was born on the day of Pentecost. It is a gathering of human beings who, though weak, are constantly supported and guided by the Holy Spirit, who expresses and conveys the work of Christ’s salvation. Even now, everywhere

throughout the world, Christ is spiritually at work through the liturgy and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

In addition to giving importance to the grace of the sacraments, let us pray that many people in Japanese society may share the grace of the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist) and let everyone of us therefore offer all the services we are capable of. (5)

Regarding daily prayers, before the Second Vatican Council there was a prayer book entitled Prayers of the Catholic Church for all Japan, and the Angelus was daily recited by the faithful. Currently, the Liturgy of the Hours (breviary) is also recommended for the daily prayer of the laity. There are also various prayer books issued to help people pray. Let us encourage one another to spend some time every day cherishing prayer and receiving New Life by reading the Word of God. On this occasion, I highly recommend that you continue to read the Old and New Testament.

For retreats to be held in Advent and Lent, I would propose taking “faith” as the main theme during this “Year of Faith.” It will be an opportunity to reflect on our own faith as well as to deepen it.

5. Witness of faith and love.

The “Year of Faith” is a good opportunity to deepen our faith and to practice Christian Love. (Porta Fidei 14) “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (I Corinthians 13: 13).

Jesus said. “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25: 40). This is an important message to be received with deep faith. So many people, no matter how greatly deprived of human dignity, are seeking understanding and solidarity, liberation and salvation, and desire to be truly cared for as human beings. Again, it is not unusual to find people suffering from deep loneliness and loss of purpose who cannot understand who they are and what life is for. The fact that in modern Japan the number of suicides is

extremely high is a problem that should be etched deeply in our minds as disciples of Christ. Amid these harsh modern realities, putting into practice the love of God that accepts and recognizes every person as irreplaceable will be an important witness in transmitting faith to people. This testimony of God's love is the very work of evangelization.

I think it is an important duty of the faith community to look at the reality of our society and our world while studying the social doctrines of the Church and to strive with courage and wisdom to overcome the problems of humanity.

Our life is a journey of faith, a pilgrimage. (6) Thankful that "we have passed already from death to eternal life" (John 5:24, I John 3:14), and remembering those who have left this world, we are guided every day by the Holy Spirit. I pray through the intercession of the Holy Virgin Mary that we ourselves may participate in the completion of the Passover from death to life.

May the abundant blessings of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you always.

September 30, 2012

Peter Takeo Okada

Archbishop of Tokyo

Postscript

The Archdiocese of Tokyo will offer a Mass to begin the "Year of Faith" on October 14 (28th Sunday of the year) at 10:00 at Sekiguchi Cathedral Church of

Tokyo, with the Archbishop as the main celebrant.

Please read also the document of the Bishops which is scheduled for publication on October 5, during the extraordinary general meeting of the Bishops. It describes the history of the evangelization of the Catholic Church in Japan after the Second Vatican Council.

Notes:

(1) The spirit of the “Year of Faith” is described in Pope Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* entitled *Porta Fidei* (The Door of Faith). (Published by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan).

(2) For the three priorities, see for example the New Year’s Mass sermon of January 10, 2010. “Ongoing faith formation, Spiritual growth (promotion of evangelization by the laity),” “Growth as a multinational church (Pastoral care for foreigners),” “Mental problems and Mental support (Supporting people who suffer from spiritual and mental ailments).”

(3) The revised translation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council is scheduled for publication next spring. It consists of 16 texts (four Constitutions, three Declarations, and nine Decrees). I recommend that you study the contents by reading the commentaries. I especially recommend that you also read the text itself of *Lumen Gentium*, (Constitution on the Church) and *Gaudium et Spes* (Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

(4) Four types of Catechism books are available, all published by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Teaching of the Catholic Church. Considering the Japanese situation and culture, the Catholic Bishops' Conference published this new book compiled on the basis of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

YOUCAT. The Japanese Bishops' youth department is translating and plans to publish in June next year a new book for youth.

(5) You can also learn about the sacraments from the four types of Catechisms listed above.

(6) During the "Year of Faith," pilgrimages to various holy places (Sanctuaries which commemorate the Lord Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints and the martyrs) as a journey to deepen the faith are highly recommended.

Sermon for International Day

23 September 2012, Tokyo Cathedral

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ,

We are gathered here today to celebrate the International Day Mass. It is the 25th Sunday in the liturgical calendar and the World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is predicting his Passion. However, the disciples did not understand what it was all about. Probably they vaguely anticipated that something horrible was going to happen. The Scripture reads: "They did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him" (Mk 9:32). They had something more exciting to occupy their minds: "Who is the greatest among us?" When Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" they became silent. This was probably because they felt a bit ashamed of themselves. None of them understood the heart of Jesus who was proceeding through the way of the Cross.

However, the disciples encountered later the resurrected Jesus and came to understand deeply the meaning of his words and his life. That was after they received the Holy Spirit.

As we start the Year of Faith on October 11th, the great challenge proposed to us is to know Jesus Christ better.

John's Gospel proclaims: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). The Father witnessed how his beloved Son was humiliated, taunted, abandoned, and sentenced to a cruel death on the cross. The Father must have felt excruciating pain. To this Father, Jesus cried out: "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani? (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)" (Mk 15:34). Jesus' physical and spiritual conditions were at their breaking points. In what spirit did Jesus utter these words?

To know Jesus is to know his suffering. It is to participate in his suffering. He wants us to follow him, bearing our own crosses.

According to John's Gospel, Jesus said: "It is finished. Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:30). He entrusted all to the Father and thus completed his life on earth. Truly Jesus was "the founder of our faith and brings it to completion" (Heb 12:2). The best teacher of faith is Jesus and his life is the supreme model of our faith.

Jesus also said: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

As we start the Year of Faith, let us try to know Jesus better, by praying together, going beyond our nationalities, languages, cultures, and customs. Let us ask Our Lady's intercession so that we may be led by the Holy Spirit to become one and to walk together the path of eternal life.

Delivered on the 12th Anniversary of Archbishop Okada's Installment in St. Mary's Cathedral, Tokyo

2 September 2012

First Reading : Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Second Reading : The Epistle of James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Gospel Reading : Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Gospel:

Now when the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.

(For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, including the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.

So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, “Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?” He responded, “Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.’ You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.”

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”

Today’s Mass in St. Mary’s Cathedral here in Tokyo commemorates the 12th Anniversary of my Installment as Archbishop. I thank you for joining me here today and ask for your continued prayers for me and my office.

In today’s Gospel Jesus said: What comes out of a man is what defiles a man (Mark7:15,21). When the scribes and the Pharisees criticized that the disciples of

Jesus did not wash their hands, Jesus said in answer that it was more important to purify one's heart than to cleanse one's hands. Jesus often sharply accused the Pharisees and scribes of their hypocrisy. "You are clean on the outside, but inside you are full of extortion and rapacity. You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness (from the Gospel of St. Matthew 23:25-27).

Such crude accusations often enrage the accused. You too might find this a little too much, but Jesus spoke candidly. He criticized in a forthright and scathing manner. He says, "From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts." There is a long list of such evil thoughts in the Scriptures.

This reminds me of a similar teaching by Paul the Apostle in his Epistle to the Galatians. He talks of the works of the flesh, and in comparison, the fruits of the Spirit. When we compare these two teachings, what Jesus and Paul say are in fact quite similar.

Only in Paul's case there is a longer list of bad qualities, which are the works of the flesh, rather than good ones, which are the fruits of the Spirit. So much so that you might even begin to wish you were through with it quickly. You might want to take a glance at this list later. It appears in Chapter 5 of Galatians.

"The desires of man's heart are evil from the beginning" (Genesis 8:21), said God at the time of Noah's Flood. Also, you can find the following words in the Book of Jeremiah: "More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy" (Jeremiah 17:9). How very unfortunate! Can a single one of us, who are gathered here today, deny this and declare "No, I have no such problems."?

Our evil thoughts may lie asleep most of the time, but the moment when an occasion arises, they come creeping out and spur us on to evil deeds.

Now, please allow me to move onto a slightly different subject and tell you about the letter Pope John Paul II wrote at the threshold of the year 2000, addressing all the people of the world. This was in preparation for entering the new millennium. As we enter the new millennium, he says, pointing at various historical events, we must look back upon ourselves and sincerely repent the ways we conducted ourselves in the last millennium.

Among them are the world wars—indeed there were two world wars. We also experienced genocides. How was it even possible that those who believe in God were capable of committing such atrocities? Pope John Paul II said, “Unless we sincerely repent our ways, we cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium.”

While committing a deed, people often do not consider themselves to be doing anything particularly wrong. Before we accuse others of their deeds, we must first look back upon ourselves. We must stand before God every day to lay our hearts open in order to repent of our sins in the light of God, the light of resurrected Jesus Christ feeling ‘ashamed’ of ourselves, to use a Japanese cultural sentiment.

On October the 11th this year, the Year of Faith begins. When we reflect on what we ought to accomplish in the Year of Faith, various things are being talked about and could be considered. The most vital task for us among them is to learn to know our Lord Jesus Christ better than ever.

The best way anyone can learn to know our Lord Jesus Christ is to participate in Sunday Liturgy. During Sunday Mass, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is always read, and its meanings are explained. It is followed by a sermon to further elaborate on the ways in which the Sunday Gospel relates to our daily lives and to the reality of our society.

Also the background and the history behind the Gospel have to be considered. These are written in the Old Testament. In order to understand the words and activities of Jesus Christ better, it is vitally important to study the Old Testament which explains the background in which the Gospels were written. The first reading is taken from the Old Testament. The second reading is often read from a letter by one of the Apostles.

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle and others are often chosen. The Apostles are the people, who actually met and were taught by Jesus Christ, and their writings show us their understanding of Jesus Christ as a person, and what he taught them. It is their understanding that is expressed in the New Testament. Let us deepen our understanding of Jesus Christ, as we read the letters of the Apostles and the Old Testament, not to mention the Gospel itself.

Furthermore, at Sunday Mass we join together in reciting the declaration of faith which consists of the creeds. These prayers date back to the beginning of the Church and are put together as short prayers expressing our common understanding of the Christian faith. I believe these become very important as time passes for us to make sure today how our faith was understood in the beginning.

During the last two millennia, the Church has dealt with numerous challenges. 50 years ago, the Second Vatican Council was held. According to the Second Vatican Council, the Church is an organization that has been sent out to the world in order to serve all people throughout the earth. When the reality of the Church greatly differs from that of society, it becomes difficult for us to serve the people in the best way. It is for this reason that the Council met, and the people gathered there discussed and counseled each other on how they could followed the Holy Spirit to accomplish the Church's mission in a better way. The Council's documents are the fruit of prayers offered under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is my sincere hope that you too will study the teachings of these documents.

Sermon for Trinity Sunday and Confirmation

3rd June 2012, Matsubara Church

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40

Second Reading: Romans 8:14-17

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20 (Quotation from the Gospel follows bellow.)

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.

Today's Gospel is the final part of St. Matthew's Gospel. The eleven disciples met Jesus on a mountain in Galilee after His resurrection. It is stated: "but they doubted". Does this mean that some of the disciples believed, while others doubted? Or does it mean that they were all half in doubt?

The resurrection of Jesus was not readily accepted; not even by the disciples. St.

John's Gospel tells us how Thomas did not believe in the revelation regarding the resurrection of Jesus. It was only after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that the disciples came to believe firmly in the resurrection of Jesus. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit that made it possible for them to believe.

Jesus commanded the disciples with the following words: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations". Jesus commanded us to make disciples of all the peoples of the Earth. Therefore, we recognize it as an essential duty of the Church in Japan to continue this work.

Making disciples means, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Baptizing someone means giving that person a new gift of grace, through which the old self dies and the new self rises to everlasting life. It also means bestowing on the new person the life of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If we summarize what Jesus ordered us to do, it amounts to the following commandment of love: "Love one another as I have loved you".

Jesus also said, "I am with you always, until the end of the age." We might ask, "In what way will Jesus be with us until the end of the age?" When the words of Jesus are spoken, Jesus is with us. When two or three people gather to pray in the name of Jesus, Jesus is with us. When we celebrate Mass, Jesus is with us. The resurrected Jesus is present in Holy Communion. Jesus exists within one who is poor, one who suffers, one who has no place in this world. Jesus is to be found in the "smallest person".

We, the Church, are indeed the sign that proves the resurrection of Jesus. We must become an even brighter sign of his presence, a shining beacon to guide all

peoples throughout the world. We should endeavor to be such a Church, that when people see us, they can believe that Jesus has really been resurrected, and is with the people of the Church.

I recall the following words by Pope Paul VI. "Our Lord has left us to be at the side of the Father in heaven, but the Church remains here on earth as the everlasting sign of his presence in our midst. It is a sign that is sometimes dim, but one that sometimes also burns brightly. It is only in doing so that we can say we are fulfilling our duties, and responding to our calling as missionaries of Jesus Christ." [Pope Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization), Chapter 15]

We celebrated Pentecost last week and remembered that Jesus remains at our side by sending us the Holy Spirit, which is His own Spirit. As you are aware, Pope Benedict XVI declared a Year of Faith, which begins on the 11th of October, 2012. Let us pray that with the light of the Holy Spirit to guide us, we can carry out our mission and faithfully accomplish all that God wills on earth just as He does in heaven.

Sermon for Confirmation and First Holy Communion

May 13, 2012 Sixth Sunday of the Easter Season
Franciscan Chapel Center, Roppongi

First Reading: Acts 10:25~26. 34~35. 44~48

Second Reading: 1 John 4:7~10

Gospel: John 15:9~17

Today is the Sixth Sunday of the Easter Season. □During Mass the sacrament of confirmation will be given, and first holy communion will take place.

The sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist together are called the “sacraments of initiation”. They are all the work of the same Jesus Christ, and give the grace of the same Jesus Christ.

Baptism makes us share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We die with him, and with him we become sharers in his resurrected life. We are able to have all our sins forgiven, and to be born as God’s children.

Confirmation makes us take part in the gifts of Pentecost, the coming down of the Holy Spirit, and it gives us, as members of the Church, a mission to proclaim God’s love in a powerful way.

The eucharist is the sacrament by which we receive the body and blood of Jesus in the form of bread and wine, so that we become one body with him and are more deeply united to him.

So now, let’s try to get a feel for the words that Jesus speaks in the gospel today. He said, “This is my commandment: love one another, as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friend.” (John 15:12-13)

Everyone knows that Christianity is a religion of love, and that the center of Jesus Christ’s teaching is love.

The evangelizers, the missionaries, who gave Christianity to Japan in what we call the “Christian Era”, were puzzled, at a loss about what Japanese word to use for this “Christian love”.

The original Greek word that the bible uses to tell about this love is “agape”. The

Japanese bible today uses “ai” for “agape”. Even though it means many different kinds of love, it also means the special love of “agape”. But the missionaries of four hundred years ago did not want to use the word “ai”, because at that time it meant something bad. It described the heart of a person who tries to fulfill his selfish desires.

In the end, the Bateren, as priests were called in those days, decided to use “go-taisetsu” for “love”, and “taisetsu ni suru” for “to love”. The meaning is: “to care about deeply”. This is a splendid translation which people understand even today.

Jesus said, “Love one another as I love you.”

“To love” means to live as Jesus did.

Jesus’ love is a love that forgives enemies, and forgives sins.

When Jesus was crucified, Peter and the other disciples were overcome with fear. They betrayed Jesus, they abandoned him and went away. When Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to the disciples. He forgave them, and gave them the power to tell people that their sins are forgiven.

Also, Jesus taught that we should forgive our enemies, and on the cross he himself prayed to God for the people who were persecuting him: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

The love of Jesus: by that we mean he forgives the sins of every person, he accepts each person with their faults, he enables them to be reborn as new persons, he gives people courage and hope for living

The love of God: this is God’s power, that makes people able to live as God’s children, and leads them along that way.

Now, all of you who will be confirmed today, and receive the body of Jesus for the first time, I want you to not forget. You will receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, you will be given the body of the Lord, you will be joined to the Lord Jesus more deeply, you will become a person who actually lives out Christ’s love.

If you live the love of Christ, “caring deeply about others,” the people of Japan who see you doing so, will recognize that the God of love exists, and they will surely get to desire to become disciples of Christ.

Let us pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, that each one of us be given the grace to know more deeply the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ.

Easter Message from the Archbishop of Tokyo

April 8, 2012 Feast of Easter

To all the faithful in the Catholic Archdiocese of Tokyo, I announce the joy of the Resurrection of the Lord! May the Peace of the Risen Lord be with you always!

On the night of the Easter vigil many people received the sacrament of baptism, and I congratulate you all.

You have all taken part in the mystery of Christ's Passover accomplished through the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord. We have died to the 'old man' and have been transformed into something entirely new. The 'old man' means a life lived in sin and dominated by sin. The 'new man' is someone who has received the life of God and has been born again through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us engrave deeply in our hearts the words of the Apostle Paul, "Since we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Christ." (Romans 6, 8). The mission of the church is to serve as a witness to the Resurrection of Christ our Lord. In the first reading of today's Mass, the Apostle Peter testifies strongly to the Resurrection of the Lord, and declares that Jesus has overcome sin and death.

Now we who belong to the church in Japan walk together with those who are still suffering from the effects of the Great East Japan Earthquake. I hope that we may

receive light from the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, and enable this light to shine on all those affected by the disaster, as we attempt to encourage and comfort them. Therefore, let us pray sincerely for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we can walk in the path of a deep and strong faith.

Pope Benedict XVI, responding to the needs of today, has declared a “Year of Faith,” starting from October 11 of this year, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Vatican II. Let us pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that while learning the spirit of Vatican II, we may deepen our faith.

May the blessing of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit be abundantly poured out upon you all.

Sermon at the Mass for the Blessing of Oils on Holy Thursday

Saint Mary’s Cathedral, 5 April 2012

First Reading: Isaiah 61, 1-3a, 9a, 8b-9

Second Reading: Revelation 1, 5-8

Gospel: Luke 4, 16-21

In St. Luke’s gospel Jesus declares his own mission by quoting the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of

sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people." Luke 4, 18-19.

We the church have inherited this mission of Jesus.

Pope Benedict XVI, commemorating the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, has declared a "Year of Faith" that will run from Oct.11, 2012 to Nov. 24, 2013.

Vatican II produced and published important documents dealing with mission of the church..

First of all, there is "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church."

This Constitution begins with the words "Lumen gentium (Light of the nations)." "Christ is the Light of the nations. Therefore, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church." (N. 1) The mission of the church is to receive the "light" from the Lord Jesus and with this light illumine the world.

One year has passed since the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake, and Japanese society is still climbing up the steep road to reconstruction.

Today let us pray especially that we can enkindle a new light in the hearts of the afflicted through the church's celebration of Christ's resurrection.

The Mission of the Church in the modern world has been described further in the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World".

As you all know, this Constitution begins with the words "Gaudium et spes (Joy and hope)".

"The joys and hopes, the grief and anxiety of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxiety of the followers of Christ. "(N.1)

The Church has a deep interest in the current state of world affairs, as well as a deep sympathy for the grief and joy of people throughout the world.

The Church also feels called to fight for the solution of problems everywhere. In the modern world there are countless challenges and difficulties everywhere, and it is not easy for the Church to fulfill its mission of evangelization. However, those who evangelize should carry out this responsibility with enthusiasm and joy.

Pope Paul VI promulgated the Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii nuntiandi” to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the end of Vatican II. In this Exhortation it says as follows: “...may the world of today which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.” (N.80)

After the Second Vatican Council and the Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii nuntiandi” of Pope Paul VI, in 1987, the Japanese bishops held “The First National Incentive Convention for Evangelization”(NICE-1). This brought together lay people, priests, religious, and the bishops, to discuss what we should do in order to shine the light of Christ in contemporary Japanese society. This year is the 25th anniversary of the holding of NICE-1.

We priests who have received the mission to evangelize this land of Japan, today renew our “Priestly Vows”. Let us pray on this occasion that we who have received the mission to exercise priestly ministry in the name of Christ, though it be in a weak human nature like “earthen vessels”, may prepare ourselves appropriately to welcome the “Year of faith”.

In addition, let us pray that we the church, may receive the grace to assist, comfort, encourage, and stir up hope in our brothers and sisters who find themselves in difficult situations in this wilderness of modern times.

April 19 is the anniversary of the election of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. Let us pray that the Lord Our God may guide and sustain the Holy Father and pour out abundant grace over him as he fulfills his responsibility for the good of people throughout the world.

Address of Archbishop Okada at the New Year's meeting of the Archdiocese of Tokyo.

9th January 2012, St.Mary's Cathedral

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

First of all I would like to extend my cordial welcome to all of you who have gathered together here for this meeting of the New Year 2012.

1. Let's deepen our own faith (ongoing formation of faith, one of the pastoral priorities of the archdiocese of Tokyo.)

On the 11th of March last year, 2011, Japan experienced the great disaster of the Tohoku Earthquake. This disaster poses to us many challenges. Even we who believe in a loving God are obliged to ask the following questions: Why did such a

disaster occur? Why is there such evil in the world? Once again our faith is questioned when we face the tragedy that has occurred. This New Year's gathering offers us a good opportunity to reflect again on this tragedy with the eyes of faith. Recalling to mind the time when we entered into the faith, I would like to make a great effort to deepen it. More than anything else, we must try to look at Jesus Christ carefully and listen to him with serious attention.

On the 4th of January, I had the opportunity to attend a training seminar for members of the female religious congregations of the Tokyo archdiocese. Fr. Shinichi Suzuki from the Society of St. Paul, was the guest speaker at this meeting. As you know there are four Gospels and each of the four evangelists presents different characteristics of the life of Christ. At the beginning of this New Year, I feel drawn to reflect on the different characteristics of the Gospels, for example, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

During the year of St. Paul, we tried to understand more deeply his teaching. This year I would like to recommend that you deepen it more. For example, please see Paul's Letter to the Romans: chapter 8, verses 18~25, especially verse 21:

"Yet there was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God."

Nature is a wonderful sign which represents the glory of God. Nevertheless, sometimes unexpected events occur in nature, which threaten our very lives. We usually concentrate on the human level when we consider the meaning of salvation. But after March 11 of last year, I have been considering that salvation is a mystery to which humans and other creatures are linked. In other words, we participate in the mission of salvation of all creatures and of the whole universe, not only of humankind.

In Chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation, we can find the expression of a "new heaven" and a "new earth." It is said that when God's creation will be completed,

a new heaven and a new earth will appear. God will certainly save us and this world and take it to completion. With this faith and hope let us offer this year to God.

2. The Year of Faith

From October 11, 2012, the Year of Faith will start. The Holy Father decided to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. The main concern of this commemorative year should be to deepen our faith.

The Holy Father says that our time is a period where faith is on the verge of a crisis. Pope Benedict 16 fulfills his duty vigorously and is preaching every day about the faith. We too, responding to his appeal, not only at a private level, but also at an ecclesial level, and as the diocese of Tokyo, would like to endeavor to deepen our faith and make concrete plans for the realization of this purpose.

The Holy Father insists also that we should try to study the “Catechism of the Catholic Church.” After the Second Vatican Council, a special synod (a meeting of representative bishops) was held and one of the conclusions was the need of a new coherent catechism, which will include the teachings of the Councils and of the Popes of the past.

The Pope at that time was John Paul II and the chief editor was cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI.

What was produced after hearing the opinion of the Bishops from the whole world was a very thick and detailed book, and in Japan it took a great labor for the translation.

I recommend you to study this “Catechism of the Catholic Church.” It might be difficult to study it alone. Therefore, it is recommended that we study it together in study groups. There is also the compendium of this book which was published later.

There is another matter promulgated in the “Catechism of the Catholic Church.” It was recommended to produce in every country a user-friendly catechism which, based on the “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” will reflect the history, culture and local situation of each country. Following upon this recommendation, the Japan Bishop’s Conference has published some years ago a new book entitled “Katorikku Kyoukai no Oshie (The teaching of the Catholic Church).” I would appreciate it if you could study this book as well.

The year 2012 marks also the 150th anniversary of the re-opened catholic mission. Moreover it is also 150 years from the canonization of the 26 Japanese martyrs. On this occasion, reflecting on the history of the Japanese Church and meditating on the martyrs’ witness, we could learn together the words and means we should use to propagate the faith, and give witness to the Good News of Christ in this country.

This autumn, in October, there will be an important meeting (synod) on the topic of a new evangelization. From Japan, bishop Miyahara will attend.

Propagating the Good News with a new ardour, new methods and expression is the mission of today’s Church. The Holy Father wishes the participants to discuss this matter.

3. The year of Kizuna (bond, tight relationship)

Last year was named “the year of the bond.” We must first deepen our bond with God, and deepen the faith in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This strongly requires that those who share the same faith, work hand in hand to bear witness to the presence of the Kingdom of God. Isn’t it a good time to review our relationships with our neighbors once again? What about the bishops and the priests? We are always asked. Isn’t it difficult to keep good relationships with the persons closest to us? Let us have the wisdom and courage to call to mind our family and neighbors, strengthening our bonds of cooperation and opening our hearts to one another. Let us also develop bonds of intimate relationship with

those who are suffering sickness, disability and loneliness. Isn't it important to prepare a place for them where they can feel at home?

4. The light of resurrection.

I remember some words I was told in my childhood: "Have the sun in your heart!" Later, I became a catholic as an adult, and I heard different words from many people in the countryside of Japan. The expression "Have the sun in your heart!" was brought up by Mr. Yuzo Yamamoto, a famous author. We have received the light of Christ's resurrection, and we can light up our world, bringing hope to the people of Japan. The Japanese society seems to be in darkness. We are a very small presence, but in this darkness let us pray from our heart for the Holy Spirit's guidance, so that each one of us may light up this world and bring courage and hope to others.

Extending my gratitude for your cooperation also this year,

Homily for the Feast of Saint Lorenzo and Companions

28 September 2011, Franciscan Chapel Center

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Today we celebrate the feast of San Lorenzo and his companions.

Saint Lorenzo Ruiz is the first Filipino saint. He was martyred on September 29, 1637, in Nagasaki, Japan for refusal to renounce his faith, during the persecution of Japanese Christians under the Tokugawa Shogunate in the 17th century.

Lorenzo Ruiz was born in Binondo, Manila, of a Chinese father and a Tagalog mother. Ruiz served as an altar boy at the convent of Binondo church. After being educated by the Dominican friars for a few years, he married and had two sons and a daughter with Rosario, a native. Life for them was generally peaceful, religious and full of contentment.

In 1636, while working as a clerk at the Binondo church, Ruiz was falsely accused of killing a Spaniard. Due to the allegation, Ruiz sought asylum on board a ship and left for Okinawa.

Soon after arriving to Japan, the missionaries were arrested and thrown into prison. The next year they were transferred to Nagasaki to face trial by torture. On September 27, 1637, Ruiz and his companions were taken to Nishizaka Hill, where they were tortured by being hung upside down in a pit. Ruiz refused to renounce Christianity and died from blood loss and suffocation.

With 15 companions Lorenzo Ruiz was beatified in Manila on February 18, 1981, by Pope John Paul II during his papal visit to Manila, the first beatification ceremony held outside the Vatican. San Lorenzo Ruiz was canonized by Pope John Paul II in the Vatican City, Rome, on October 18, 1987 with 15 companion martyrs.

According to the homily of Pope John Paul II during the beatification Mass, Lorenzo Ruiz told the court:

Even if I had many thousands of lives, I would offer them all for Him.

Never shall I apostatize.

You may kill me if that is what you want.

To die for God, such is my will.

The holy gospel according to John says:

Whoever loves his life loses it,
and whoever hates his life in this world
will preserve it for eternal life.

There are two kinds of words which express “life” in the original Greek.

One is “psyche” and the other is “zoe”.

When Jesus says “Whoever hates his life in this world”
that “life” in this world is “psyche”.

And when he says “will preserve it for eternal life”
that “life” is “zoe”.

Jesus said: “Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God,
and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.” (John 17:3)

Let us pray that, by the intercession of Saint Lorenzo Ruiz and his companions,
we may come to know our Lord Jesus Christ better and better.

Amen.

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**Homily for the 18th Sunday in
Ordinary Time Deliverd at the**

Churches of Kamogawa and Tateyama

31 July 2011

Kamogawa and Tateyama Church, Chiba

Reading I (Isaiah 55:1-3)

Reading II (Romans 8:35, 37-39)

Gospel (Mathew 14:13-21)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's Gospel we read the following verse: "When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick" (Mt.14:14).

The expression, "his heart was moved with pity," is a translation of the Greek verb "splachnizomai." This word means that one feels pain in the depths of one's being (literally, 'bowels'), and it refers here to the pain that Jesus experienced when he beheld the sufferings of others. Jesus always had deep compassion for those who were suffering or in sorrow. In this way he became a man completely like us except for sin. Jesus felt and accepted as his own the suffering and sorrow of others. The earthly life of Jesus is the perfect revelation of the love of God the Father. When I reflect on this passage, I am reminded of the words of the prophet Hosea.

"Ephraim, how could I part with you? Israel, how could I give you up? How could I treat you as Admah, or deal with you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils from it. My

whole being trembles at the thought. I will not give vent to my blazing anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One present among you. I will not let the flames consume you” (Hosea 11:8-9).

The God of Israel reacts with a fierce anger toward all the sin and evil which people commit, but this same God is very merciful and suffers deeply as he bestows mercy on sinners. The God of Israel forgives and saves all human beings. The apostle Paul describes this love of God in his letter to the Romans:

“Everyone is a sinner and nobody is completely righteous before God, because nobody is able to observe completely the laws of God. However God offered his Son Jesus Christ, so that by his blood he could become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through faith in him. Everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence. But by the free gift of God’s grace, all are justified through Christ Jesus.

God has revealed the love of God through the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul says:

“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”

The East Japan Earthquake is a challenge to our faith in God’s mercy. Why did such a terrible disaster happen if God really exists? Why did so many innocent people suffer or lose their lives in this disaster?

We believe that Our God is the God of Jesus Christ who suffers with us in our profound sorrow. We believe in this God of compassion.

The second reading from the Mass on the 15th Sunday of the Year, July 10, was from Chapter 8 of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans. It says,

“Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to

corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:19-21).

It is not only we human beings but all creation that must be set free from corruption.

That is why God is renewing creation every day and transforming this world and the whole universe into “a new heaven and a new earth,” and we believe that someday God will complete this work of building a new Kingdom where God will reign supreme. So let us move forward with faith in our hearts as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today I pray especially for those who are going to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation that they may know more deeply the love of God and become true disciples of Jesus Christ, carrying with them throughout their lives the faith and hope and all the rich gifts that God bestows on them today through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

16th Sunday in ordinary time

17 July 2011

Goi Church, Chiba

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

Today we read in the Gospel about the parable of the wheat and weeds, which teaches us that God is patient with the weak.

The Gospel states:

When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slave of the householder came to him and said,

'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?'

He answered, 'An enemy had done this.'

His slave said to him.

'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest.'

The field where the wheat and weeds are growing together really is like this world. We are often faced with the question why is there so much evil in the world: which is what many of us thought when the East Japan Earthquake devastated our country on 11 March 2011.

The situation of the field is also similar to how we experience ourselves. We feel in ourselves that good and evil are dwelling together. We feel love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. (cf. Gal. 5:22) But in our human nature we can find fornication, impurity, quarrels, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, jealousies and the like. (cf. 5:19-21)

There is opposition between the Spirit and our human nature. St. Paul says: For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do. (Gal 5:17)

And what adds greatly to this difficulty is that good and evil are tangled together and it is very difficult to separate them.□□

As St. Paul himself says in Romans: What an unhappy man I am. Who will rescue

me from this body that is taking me to death. (Rom 7:24)

However he follows this immediately with, Thanks be to God, who does this through our Lord Jesus Christ!

In the second reading of today's Mass, St. Paul says: The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groans.

God is patient. We must be patient with the weakness of our brothers and sisters and also be patient with the weakness of our-selves. So we must pray to the Lord to give us wisdom and patience with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Homily for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

27 June 2011

St.Mary's Cathedral, Tokyo

First Reading: The Acts of the Apostles 12:1-11

Second Reading: Timothy II 4:6-8, 17-18

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-19

Brothers and sisters, we gather here today to celebrate the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, and to commemorate on this day the sixtieth anniversary of the priestly ordination of Pope Benedict XVI and the twenty-fifth, fiftieth, and sixtieth anniversaries of all the priests of the archdiocese.

We remember today that the origins of the Church go back to the apostles, chosen by the resurrected Christ, with whom to this day we have a continuous link through apostolic succession. Among the apostles, Peter and Paul had a very vital role to play in the development of the Church. Peter, who was appointed by the Lord to be first among the Twelve, became the first bishop of Rome, and was martyred in Rome.

Paul, on the other hand, initially ruthlessly persecuted the early Christians. However, after his encounter with the resurrected Lord Jesus, he was converted, and became the Apostle of the Gentiles. Subsequently, he was sentenced to death and executed outside of Rome. Through it all, Saint Paul remained a faithful apostle of Christ.

Though Saint Paul's life was an uphill battle all the way, he professes in today's Second Reading:

I have competed well;

I have finished the race;

I have kept the faith!

On this great feast of Saints Peter and Paul, let us all pray that through the examples set by Saints Peter and Paul, we may strongly adhere to the faith until that day comes when we triumphantly enter into the kingdom of God Our Father.

Now we find ourselves struggling to cope with the aftermath of the March 11, Great East Japan Earthquake. Because of this grave disaster, many people are experiencing intense suffering, deep sorrow, and profound anxiety.

It is now a well known story that on a TV program a 7-year-old Japanese girl named Elena asked the Pope a question to which he responded from the heart. As one of the spiritual leaders of the Japanese Catholic Church, I was very moved and felt grateful for the Pope's genuine response, showing himself a true shepherd caring for his flock.

We have experienced in Japan the greatest disaster on record, but will work together as one nation to rebuild what has been destroyed. Through our prayers and generosity we will do what we can to help restore and reconstruct the nation.

In this regard, we are reminded of the suffering that afflicts us all from time to time. Even without major disasters, there is suffering in life. Life is a struggle. There is an expression in Buddhist's teaching: "shiku hattsuku", which means, "Life is full of suffering and pain." Our primary concern as priests and religious is that of being close to those who are experiencing suffering and anxiety.

Let us pray to the Holy Spirit to guide and help us to be faithful in carrying out the holy priestly duties that are entrusted to us. And by our devotion, may many others respond to the Divine call to the priesthood.

On July 1, we will observe the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At this time let us go to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, and together with the suffering and afflicted, let us pray that we may adhere to the faith that comes to us through the apostles and offer ourselves as fragrant offerings to God.

On June 15, 1891, the first Archdiocese in Japan was founded in Tokyo, and Pierre Osouf was appointed the first archbishop of Tokyo. This year, the Archdiocese of Tokyo will celebrate its one hundred-twentieth anniversary. I would like to ask the people of the Tokyo Archdiocese to please pray for the future bishops and priests of the Archdiocese so that they may faithfully fulfill their pastoral duties, and always with the help of God sincerely carry out the mission entrusted to them.

Archbishop Okada's Address to Archbishop Alberto Bottari de Castello, Apostolic Nuncio to Japan, on the Occasion of the Apostolic Nuncio's Departure from Office

27 June 2011

St.Mary's Cathedral, Tokyo

On behalf of the Tokyo Archdiocese, I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to you, Archbishop Bottari. News has reached us of your transfer to Hungary, after six years in Japan. You will most certainly be missed by us all. You have frequently joined us in this Cathedral, and concelebrated the Eucharist with the priests and people of the Archdiocese and communicated your faith filled messages which were an encouragement to us all. On occasion you shared social hours with us

too. I truly thank you for all that you have done.

Over the last six years our Archdiocese has undertaken many tasks. During this time you supported and guided us most graciously and generously. I shall also never forget your unceasing counsel that saw me through my days as President of the Japan Bishops' Conference.

During your term of office, two Japanese Cardinals were summoned to Heaven, Cardinal Hamao and Cardinal Shirayanagi, both from the Tokyo Archdiocese. Their return to Heaven brought great sorrow to the Catholic Church in Japan. It was here in this Cathedral that the funeral services were held for them, and you prayed together with us for them. For this also I thank you.

Last, but not least, I pray for your continued success and good health as you take up your new assignment in Hungary.

Homily at the Memorial Mass for Ms Izumi Masako (Braille Library)

21st June, 2011

Held at Yotsuya Blessed Nicholas Barre Church

Bible Reading: First Epistle to Timothy 2:4-7

Gospel Reading: The Gospel according to John 3:16-21

I would like to dedicate our mass today to the memory of Izumi Masako (Maria Monica) and pray that perpetual peace be granted to her.

Izumi Masako was born in 1924 and graduated Showa Women's Pharmaceutical Junior College to become a pharmacist in 1945, as the Second World War drew to a close. (She found a position upon graduation but it remains unknown whether she was employed as a pharmacist.)

It was Father Tsukamoto Shouji who bestowed baptism upon her at Senzoku Church in 1949. In 1958 she was requested by Father Tsukamoto to help him compile Braille materials, and from that day she worked steadfastly for the Braille Library, to which she dedicated her life-long career of 58 years. I would like us once again to offer our respects to Ms Izumi, who gave her life wholly to helping the visually impaired.

The Catholic Braille Library founded by Ms Izumi and Father Tsukamoto has since become the Logos Braille Library. It is lodged in the Catholic Center, which stands next to Shiomi Catholic Church. This is the church that is associated with Kitahara Satoko (Elizabeth Maria), often known as Ari no Machi no Maria, or Mary of Ant Town.

This brought to my attention the fact that Ms Kitahara also studied at Showa Women's Pharmaceutical Junior College, where Ms Izumi studied, to qualify as a pharmacist. She did not choose to work as a pharmacist, however, and instead lived among the garbage collectors of Ant Town, until her demise at the age of 28. These are several ways in which the lives of Ms Izumi and Ms Kitahara are

similar: studying at the same institute to qualify as pharmacists, yet choosing not to pursue their careers in the field, and devoting their lives instead to supporting the poor and the handicapped.

Incidentally, Ms Izumi was born in 1924, five years before the birth of Ms Kitahara Satoko.

Naturally there are also points on which they were dissimilar. Ms Kitahara lived a short life and was well recognised in her lifetime. Ms Izumi's 86-year life in contrast was a quieter one; she never came into fame and fervently devoted her daily service to God. It is this life of hers that I would like to cherish today.

As it happens, Ms Kitahara also learned the Braille system in her short lifetime. According to "Tenji to Ari no Machi no Maria" ("Braille and Mary of Ant Town") by Matsui Toru, there was a woman working at an eating place in Ant Town, whose daughter was without sight. She wrote to her mother in Braille which the mother could not read. Ms Kitahara learned the Braille system so that she could read these letters to her. Here again is that curious connection.

Earlier in the Gospel according to John, we heard the following:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16, King James Version)

Ms Izumi believed in our Lord Jesus, and her testimony of faith was to follow the call to devote her life to the Braille Library.

There is a Buddhist saying "to shed light upon one corner", which I think applies to Ms Izumi's life. Through her work at the Braille Library, she was able to shine light upon those around her, keeping the light that is the Resurrection of Christ

alive. In this way, she quietly proclaimed her belief in the Lord God, who wishes that all people may be saved and so enter into everlasting life.

Let us pray for her that as she is released from life's labors, she will be granted perpetual peace in the presence of our Lord Christ, and enjoy the blessing of beholding God.

Homily at the Diocesan Joint Confirmation Mass -Pentecost Sunday

12 June 2011 (Pentecost Sunday)

at St.Mary's Cathedral Sekiguchi Church of Tokyo

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

It is Pentecost Sunday today. And today's "hero" is the Holy Spirit.

We believe in the Trinity God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We can have a vivid image on the Son, Jesus Christ by reading the Gospels. And we also feel familiar with God, the Father, to whom we often offer "Our Father" and other prayers, not to speak of Mass. But what can we say about the Holy Spirit? Holy Spirit may be expressed with symbol of "fire" or "dove", but we cannot see the face of the Holy Spirit. How can we consider about the Holy Spirit.?

The Holy Spirit is the breath of God. We are unable to see breath of human, but certainly it exists. The same can be said about the breath of God. God creates the world and human beings with his own breath and always making the world new. The world is always being renewed and finally shall be renewed as the world realized completely according to the will of God.

At the same time the Holy Spirit is the breath of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ poured the Spirit upon the Apostles and founded the Church, and sent the Apostles all over the world. They received the forgiveness of sins through the Spirit and also received the mission to give the forgiveness of sins with the work of the Holy Spirit. Now the Church is a big family of God throughout the world.

Today we are together in this Cathedral to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. Among those who are going to receive the Sacrament, there exist many differences in many points just like there are many parts in our body, for example, hand, leg, eye, ear, mouth and so on.

Our Church is composed of various people of various roles and services.

I would like to ask each of you with what you want to serve God.□What a role do you have as your own role different from others?

What were you born to do in his world? What is the reason that there are so many differences among us?

I believe that it is for us to help one another and respect one another to build a beautiful family of the God.

Through the Confirmation God grant us the seven Gifts of the Spirit. They are the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of wonder and awe. They are given you so that you may fulfill your role and mission better in your life.

In these 7 graces, wisdom and courage are included.

In the new-year's card of this year, I sent the following prayer.

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change...

Courage to change the things I can,

And wisdom to know the difference.

□(It is reported that this was written by Reinhold Niebuhr)

Unexpectedly we are spending this year as the year of the Great Eastern

Japan Earthquake. We need more wisdom and courage to confront this difficulty.

Therefore I give you this prayer to all of you who are going to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.