

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.