

DIOCESE OF SAITAMA

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To all my brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Saitama:

*“For we have seen his star in the East,  
and have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:2)*



In the name of Lord Jesus and his Holy Family I wish you a very happy Christmas 2018 and New Year 2019!

First of all, I would like to thank each one of you in the parishes, in the spiritual and pastoral movements, and in the religious communities for the fraternal and warm welcome you have given to me, for receiving me as your new bishop, and for praying for me.

Following in the footsteps of my predecessor bishops, I'm sending you my message for Christmas 2018 and New Year 2019. May the year 2019 be filled with grace as we begin it with the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and World Day of Peace !

**With Great Gratitude**

Right after receiving an announcement of my appointment to bishop of the diocese of Saitama, I was invited to the Diocesan Pastoral Workers Conference (June 25 to 27) by

Archbishop OKADA Takeo, then apostolic administrator of the diocese. It was my first contact with so many of the priests, deacons, religious and laity committed to the diocesan pastoral work, and sharing the time with them gave me a clearer sense of being their bishop.

Then, at the episcopal ordination held at the Jubilee Hall of Akenohoshi School, we had more than 1,600 people, including all the bishops of the Japanese Episcopal Conference and fellow bishops from abroad, provincials and priests from various religious congregations, priests from the diocese of Saitama and many lay people. It was undoubtedly a true ecclesial Pentecost to me.

### **Following the Star**

Let me share with you what resonated deeply within me through the Masses and conversations at my first pastoral visits to the parishes and religious communities after the episcopal ordination. They have helped me know what the diocese is like, both at the charismatic level from the style and atmosphere of the community life and at the institutional level from the organization, commissions and groups of the parish.

The diocese of Saitama, without a doubt, has a great future. The Holy Spirit has worked wonders and continues to surprise me with his renewed action on our diocese. The Magnificat that the Church prays at Vespers every day renews in our lives the same feelings that the Virgin Mary had before the merciful and providential work of God.

I would like to relate this message to the scene of the Magi of the East who, following the signs of a great star, arrived in Bethlehem where they found the Child Jesus with Mary and Joseph and each one gave him a treasure as sign of adoration and love. I can identify with this passage of the Magi of the East that Saint Matthew the Evangelist describes due to the origin and path of my Christian faith just as some Japanese and immigrants shared at the New Evangelization Year Meetings.

### **A Young Couple Who Saw a Star in the East**

On May 31, 1964, my parents and their five children, among whom I was the oldest at the age of eight and a half years, left Yokohama Port for Argentine. My father left behind his job and steady income, his newly-built house, his relatives and friends. Above all he had a dream: for him it was a call from God: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).

This dream came true through readings and the Spanish language he taught himself on the radio language program. He was 35 years old. I think that moment of life was a strong "Kairos," the appointed time in the purpose of God. When the most influential decision or the future was made in their lives, my parents were more than convinced that this was the dream of God.

And then they kept walking the path guided by the star, which was not always seen. They once lived in San Juan, the province at the foot of the Andes Mountains where it rained only

three or four times a year. They must have looked at the stars and felt sure that God was always with them.

My father left the secure life with the salaries from Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation just to be a farmer. It turned out that none of the books on agriculture he had bought in Japan helped him in the face of the climatic and geographical reality of San Juan. But soon they learned a Spanish proverb: "Praying to God and swinging the mallet." That is why they began each day with the morning prayer and ended the day with one cycle of the Rosary at night, and they brought up their 9 children on the spirit of adventure.

Every one of my siblings has lived diverse experiences to this day. As a Spanish poet Antonio Machado says: "Wayfarer, there is no way. Make your way by going further."

### **Star of the New Evangelization (EN 82, EG 284)**

I finish this message with a reference to Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of our diocese. Ten years after the closing of the Second Vatican Council, to many different titles of Mary a new gem of "Star of Evangelization" (EN82) was added in the Apostolic Exhortation on the Evangelization of the Contemporary World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975). And Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, The Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium*, underlines that "without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization" (EG 284). Mary does know how to find the opportune words and deeds that make us lovable as a faithful people of God. As the true source of our happiness she helps us appreciate the Gospel of Jesus.

May Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of each one of us, be a sure star to guide our walk as we the diocese of Saitama begin the new year as a people of God. With my blessing upon all of you as your pastor and servant always,

Mario YAMANOUCHI Michiaki  
Bishop of the Diocese of Saitama

Christmas 2018