

I wish to encourage you! --The message from the Bishop

The Right Reverend Mario Michiaki Yamanouchi, The Bishop of Saitama

I offer the mass by my own self at the small chapel in the Bishop's House every morning. Without any of you, nevertheless, I strongly feel of your presence to offer the mass with me. I know all of you wish to attend the mass as soon as possible, so that I pray for you at the mass wholeheartedly for the ceasing of the spread of the Novel Corona Virus.

I also think of the children who cannot go to school, and of the youth, and of those who have lost their jobs after closing their businesses, or even those who have lost their dwellings. Nevertheless, they still make all the efforts as part of the society for the prevention of the spreading of the Virus. Now it our turn to think about what the church can do for them in need and for the society in difficulties. Because I wish you encouraged at this difficult time, I write my following messages for you.

What faith we have been given? Is that too small or weak?

Some of you may be worried about the church and about your faith without attending at the mass for such a long time. I myself am, however, not worried at all. I say this because I know of the churches in the South America. It sounds strange though, but I think that not many of the people coming to Japan from the South American countries did not attend the mass regularly on Sundays when they lived there. When they came to Japan with tiny Catholic population, but still found the Catholic church here and became to join in the mass on Sundays, they were rejoiced as they realized that they had not lost faith totally and utterly.

I remind you of the Catholics here in Japan who never lost their Catholic faith during the time of severe persecutions lasting over 250 years without priests, masses, sacraments. We should not be worried at all.

This is the time of trials, at the same time, it is the time of God's grace as well.

I think, this is indeed the time of trials which we never imagined. However, I feel that it may be the time of God's grace beyond our thoughts.

Our Lord Jesus, I think, reminds us of the things, that is as follows:

First of all, because of the spread of the Novel Corona Virus Infections, we now cannot do the following things, which we have been taking for granted before.

- We now cannot attend at the mass, receive the communion and the sacrament of reconciliation for such a long time.

However, Jesus may question you or tell you as follows:

- Why you think that you cannot offer your prayers in thanksgiving or in praising to God without attending at the mass on Sundays?
- You can see me at any time even at the time you cannot receive the communion as I am walking with you always. Why do you feel lonely or lost?
- Why not you ask God the Father directly for His absolution for your sins?

It is, I think, the chance given by God for you to ask yourself of your faith or ask that if you have really lived out the faith by trusting in God the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

Therefore, I want you to have the present time for thinking about the following things.

- Because you now cannot receive the sacraments, please try to make this present time the chance for thinking deeply focusing on the meaning and the graces of the sacrament in its depth.
- Because you cannot come to gather with your friends at the church, let us think carefully about the importance of the community and its graces.

The grace of becoming aware of important things.

I have another reason that it is the time of God's grace; that is, the present situation with the spreading of the Novel Corona Virus makes us aware of quite a few important things which I have long overlooked, in spite of the calling by Jesus. Such as:

- We have been lost in the superficial richness of the globalizing world, but which changes all the time; therefore we have not been aware of the truth that 'the earth is our home for all the human and all the creatures', despite of that the Holy Father reminded us of that in his encyclical.
- We now know that our home-the earth is the home for the horrible virus, too.
- In this home of ours, there live uncountable people who suffer, of whose existence and cries we are now become conscious. Also, we become aware of the fact that once the calamity beyond our thoughts occurs, such as the spread of the Novel Corona Virus, there will be so many people who easily become the victims suffering the most from the disasters.

- We become aware of the fact that all of us living in this home of our, the earth, have to support each other as we have the same experiences and face the same sufferings. Particularly, we Christians now feel much stronger that we all are united with Christ as the one family loved by God.

It is now the time for us to be with Jesus.

It is not the time of grief but the time of God's grace, even the time of the resurrection.

The disciples of Jesus once closed the doors in the fear of the humans as they were discouraged by the death of Jesus because they could not believe in his resurrection. Nevertheless, Jesus, the Risen Lord, went first to Galilee to wait them. Like them it is now the time for us to stand up.

In the time of sorrow or sadness, thinking of Jesus who walked via dolorosa toward to the cross in silence as well as looking up him on the cross who offered himself for our forgiveness of sins, we want to walk with him. I am of no doubt that the Risen Lord is walking together with us.

I believe that I share this same faith with you.

Finally,

It is difficult to imagine at this moment that, however I am sure, the time will come when the Bishop, the priests, the religious, and all the faithful gather together to celebrate the mass without worries in the near future. What I am looking forward to at that time to come is to visit you in your parishes again as soon as possible, and to pray together and talk together with you how to make all of us one in Christ, sharing with you our experiences of overcoming this difficult time together.

Please pray together with me to God the Father, further more trusting in His mercy, as well as thinking of all, through the intercessions of the most blessed Virgin Mary, that Our merciful God may give those who died by the disease in spite of all the efforts given by the medical professionals eternal rest, and may restore the lives to the full for those who have been infected or been suffering still, and, also, may take full control over the present situation worldwide.

Yours ever in Christ.