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Bishop's New Years Message for 2009

***THE FAITHFUL CONTINUED DAILY WITH ONE HEART TO MEET IN THE TEMPLE AREA, AND THEY GATHERED TO BREAK BREAD IN EACH OTHERS HOMES, WHERE THEY ATE THEIR MEALS TOGETHER WITH GLADNESS AND SINCERITY OF HEART WHILE PRAISING GOD***

### **To all my Brothers and Sisters of Saitama Diocese,**

Merry Christmas! And, Happy New Year! How will you be spending your Christmas and New Years Holiday this year?

I am always praying for all of you and thanking God from my heart because in the various parishes and in the block areas you have been placing importance on your community life and on helping people who have been marginalized by society.

In 2008, we began Team Ministry for Pastoral Evangelization. In addition, we also celebrated the Centennial of Brazilian Immigration and the Beatification of 188 Martyrs. In 2009, we are planning to have such events as: a Mini Soccer Meet where one block area will play against another, our Diocesan Convention, and the Japan Justice and Peace Council Saitama Convention, as well as other events. At these events as well, I expect that the results of interaction among the faithful in our communities and block areas will be readily apparent.

On the other hand, in our society there has been an economic downturn and financial crisis that originated in the United States, there has been a concern about jobs, a fear for the safety of food etc., and an ever expanding list of worries. Please remember that precisely because life is so difficult in the midst of all these worries, that trust in God is more important than ever. Our real hope comes from listening to the Word of God, and obeying in deed our Lord and Savior Jesus.

### **<A Community Centered on the Word of God and the Holy Eucharist>**

For the title I used the words from the Acts of the Apostles 2:46-47 which recounts the life of the faithful of the Early Church. In the first half it is written that they with one heart used to gather at the temple. Through the Scriptures they listened to the Word of God, thought about Jesus, and

praised God. We continue this practice even now in the first half of the Mass which is called the “Liturgy of the Word”. In the second half of the passage it is shown that the faithful gathered at a number of homes, their community shared in the breaking of the bread, they had meals together, and they offered praise to God. This corresponds to the “Liturgy of Thanksgiving” during the second half of the Mass. Even now, we too share in the Eucharist. And at Bazaars or Fiestas we too share meals together.

I know very well that all of you give great importance to the “Word of God” and the “Eucharist,” the two central parts of the Mass. I know that you gather together each Sunday, and at Easter, Christmas and for welcoming the New Year, continuing in the same way as the faithful of the Early Church to offer praise to God. It is precisely for this reason that our community continues to exist.

### **<A Community that Nurtured 20,000 Martyrs >**

I hope however that our community can become even more abundant. For this to happen, what can we do? I think that from what we have learned together from the beatification of the 188 martyrs there might be a hint for us.

Think about the Christian Community of 400 years ago that had over 20,000 martyrs at a time when Christianity was prohibited in Japan. It is known that at that time there were about 400,000 to 600,000 Catholics. Therefore, there was 1 martyr for every 20 or 30 Catholics. There can be no doubt that they had a very strong faith. However, it is difficult to explain the number of 20,000 martyrs simply by saying that each of them had a strong faith. The only way to explain these astounding numbers is to say that it was precisely because the community had a very strong faith that there were such a great number of martyrs.

Let’s compare then and now. Then there was a Service of the Word but there was no Mass. While desiring to have the Eucharist and a priest, they gathered together each week, not to hear the thoughts of a human being, but to center their service on the teachings of God. What about our community now?

Another point to consider is “sharing”. During the era when Christianity was prohibited in Japan, the Christians shared in the roles done by the absent priest, by diligently dividing up his roles among themselves, and by sharing together. What about our own era? Are the faithful sharing about the Word of God with each other and encouraging one another?

Naturally there are common elements from this early era of Christianity in Japan and now. These are also the common elements that we have with the Early Church: the existence of a community, the faithful meeting each week, listening to the Word of God, always praising God and so on.

### **<Sharing Based on the Word of God Makes a Community More Abundant >**

The foundation of Team Ministry for Pastoral Evangelization is not based on overly relying

on a priest, but rather on all of the faithful being the principle bearers of the various roles in the community. In this environment, if there is sharing based on the Word of God, it becomes possible for the community to have an even stronger faith. Sharing is also possible in the family or in the form of gatherings of the faithful at various homes. Gathering for the elderly are also necessary. It is also possible to use the time before or after gatherings for cleaning in the Church. It is also possible to have gatherings of friends that are not just from the Church. Please also have gathering for young people so that they can do more sharing about the Scriptures. Of course, it is also necessary to have gatherings with sharing in different languages. Please create opportunities to gather for such sharing. And when necessary please invite priests or religious to share with you about the Scriptures.

The Diocese has promoted using the Scriptures as the basis for sharing together up until now, but please help to create and promote even more concrete opportunities for small numbers of people to gather together to share the Word of God. Through these efforts, our community will be given even greater graces and it will become possible to foster love, faith and a true hope among ourselves.

I send my blessing upon all of you that this year will be a year of many graces that flow from being given life from the Word of God.

+May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all.

January 1, 2009

Catholic Saitama Diocese  
Bishop Marcellino Tani Daiji