

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

August 16, 2020

Homily of Most Reverend Mario Yamanouchi Michiaki

Bishop of the Diocese of Saitama

Let the peoples praise you, O God (Psalm 67)

### **Migration spreading around the world**

When I finally returned to Japan in February 1997, I met many Latinos, especially Brazilians and Peruvians, and Filipinos. I was amazed that many of them live in Kyushu region and Shizuoka Prefecture. Then I remembered that the first time I left Argentina for Italy in 1985 and met a large group of Filipinos at the Salesian Church of the Sacred Heart in front of Termini Station in Rome.

We know that humanity has been always on the move. For example, at the end of the 1800's, Argentina, a country on the other side of the world, received many immigrant groups from Italy, Spain, Germany and other European and the Middle East countries. After the First World War it began to receive immigrants from Asian countries too. Argentina now has numerous communities of Koreans, Japanese and people from the neighboring countries of Paraguay and Bolivia.

When Pope Francis visited Lampedusa Island in 2013, he called us to receive refugees and immigrants not only in Europe but in all the countries if the need arises. This movement of migration has been growing worldwide due to various factors such as economic, ethnic, and climatic.

Japan has been sending immigrants to various countries and welcoming foreigners at the same time. The children and grandchildren of the immigrants are called "Nikkei," or Japanese descent. They return to Japan in search of work and a better future for their children. Japan still needs manpower to promote economic development, so it continues to receive foreigners from various continents.

During my visits as bishop of the Diocese of Saitama, I was very happy to find that the

parishes in the four prefectures (Saitama, Gunma, Ibaraki and Tochigi) are communities open to foreigners: They are international with the membership of Filipinos, Vietnamese, Latin Americans (Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, etc.), other Asian groups (Indonesia, Sri Lanka, etc.), some Europeans and others from the Middle East.

### **The call of the Word of God**

The migration is growing every day all over the planet due to multiple factors. The arrival of foreign people brings richness in several ways, but also causes rejection and even hatred (xenophobia) in some groups or people. It is urgent to stop all kinds of hatred against members of other ethnic groups or of other religions and to generate more universal and fraternal experiences so that people can be recognized in their dignity and vocation as sons and daughters of God.

The Church, as Mother and Teacher, has an important mission to promote the universal vision that helps us human beings look at the big picture. Today's liturgy encourages the faithful to take inspiration from the Bible and to assume respect and responsibility for difference.

### **I will bring the foreigners to my holy mountain. (Isaiah 56:1, 6-7)**

On their return from the exile (6th century B.C.), the disciples of Isaiah went back to the teachings of the 8th century prophet and proposed to build the new Israel open to the values of universality and ecumenism. Openness, however, is not based only on diplomatic commitment, nor on an easy and false illusion, but requires much patience; it is an openness that has to be based on cultivating the universal justice.

The third part of the Book of Isaiah, in this sense, does not propose that all the religions of its time be brought together under the one banner of the leadership of Jerusalem. Rather, it proposes that the people born out of those fifty years of exile unify the various peoples to make up the new Israel, for God offers the grace of salvation to every man and woman without distinction. Hence, in the Old Testament, God opens his arms to welcome the foreigners in his land of Israel (People of God). The prophecy of Isaiah gives us the understanding that the salvation of God is for all peoples, not only for the Jews.

In this perspective, the psalmist today invites us to proclaim with him: "Let the peoples praise you, O God!"

**God is merciful to all. (Romans 11:29-32)**

St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, confirms that all individuals and all peoples will enjoy God's mercy. Paul is a key figure in this universal vision of salvation: Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he opened the door of the gospel (Christianity) to the Gentiles, beyond the Jews, by travelling and establishing various communities throughout the Mediterranean region.

**Woman, great is your faith! (Matthew 15:21-28)**

Jesus of Nazareth shows the reality of the Kingdom of God that opens a new path for foreigners and excludes no one. Whoever accepts Jesus as Lord and follows him as his disciple is called to recognize the presence of God in every person and to welcome all people as brothers and sisters. Therefore, Christians cannot fear or hate foreigners. We must continue to fight to break down the mechanisms that marginalize people and separate them from one another by nationality and social status.

**Let us conclude by praying**

May we, like Jesus, discover the faith and religious values of many brothers and sisters who have come from various countries to work, live and raise their children in Japan. Let us pray to the Lord.

May we teach our children to obey the rules of society as good citizens, to appreciate the Japanese society's warm acceptance of migrants and people on the move, and to always help one another within their community. Let us pray to the Lord.

May the leaders of today's world unite with Pope Francis to overcome racial and cultural conflicts and build a more human and supportive world. Let us pray to the Lord.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE).