

Chrism Mass

Wednesday, September 16, 2020, at Urawa Church

Homily of Most Reverend Mario Yamanouchi Michiaki

Bishop of the Diocese of Saitama

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.**

(Luke 4:18)

1. the gospel scene (to be emphasized)

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and on the sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the following passage:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

for he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.” (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1)

Situations to note (comments)

- * Jesus was brought up and lived in Nazareth for so many years that he is called Nazarene.
- * If he **“came to Nazareth,”** it is likely that he had already begun his public ministry and was more likely to stay in Capernaum, especially at Peter’s house.
- * And he **“went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as was his custom.”** In other words, as a good Jew, he faithfully observed the sabbath day by going into the local synagogue to listen to the reading and interpretation of the Bible.
- ***This time, however, he was probably chosen to read and comment on the Bible because he had returned to his hometown, which was unusual,** and he was given a scroll of the prophet Isaiah.
- *The Book of Isaiah given to Jesus to read aloud was not a book like the one we have in our hands today, but it was written on a parchment scroll. And one of the customs of reading the Bible was to read and comment on the part that caught your eye when you opened the scroll.

After reading the passage from Isaiah, Jesus said:

“Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

The people who were listening were amazed and increasingly suspected because Jesus was just the son of Joseph, so he could not perform miracles in Nazareth, his own hometown, unlike in Capernaum. Not only that, but what Jesus said offended them so much that they took him to a cliff to kill him, but Jesus left there.

* Even Jesus himself was unable to show signs of the fulfillment of the kingdom of God in his own hometown. I think we have more occasions like this than we think, especially in this year's new coronavirus pandemic.

2. A special Chrism Mass in 2020

Today, due to the spread of the new coronavirus, the Chrism Mass, which is usually offered on Holy Wednesday in the Diocese of Saitama, was delayed in this way and it was decided to offer it today with only the representatives of each Block of the diocese and the young deacons, without the participation of the congregation. Help is being sought from the priests and deacons to prepare to bring back the holy chrism oil after Mass. We ask you to take it home with you and give it to all the priests in your Blocks. As you hand it out, it would be good for all the priests in your Block to get together and discuss the future progress of the Church.

On Monday, September 14, the Archdiocese of Tokyo announced **Re: EASING OF RESTRICTIONS ON CHURCH ACTIVITIES**. It says that while the diocese will remain in Stage 3, the age limit of 75 years old will not be enforced anymore after September 19. However, in Tokyo yesterday, there were still 196 people infected with COVID-19.

In the Diocese of Saitama, I have issued eleven policies ("responses") since February, and we kept up with the Archdiocese of Tokyo until mid-June. As our situation has not exactly been the same as in Tokyo since then, I have been consulting with our priests to come up with "responses" to cherish the unity of our diocese. I'm truly grateful for the tremendous cooperation of the priests. Thank you.

I would like to take this opportunity to discuss with you after Mass, except for those who are packing the chrism oil, "easing the restrictions on church activities in the Diocese of

Saitama" from October onwards. As always, I would like to consult with our priests and deacons to determine the policy of our diocese.

3. Walk with Pope Francis and the bishops of Japan

You may have seen the photo of the Pope standing alone under the tent on the stage set up in front of St. Peter's Basilica on March 27 of this year, speaking towards the Way of Reconciliation (Via della Conciliazione).

You can only see a few security people at the entrance to the square. It was raining, the temperature was 11 degrees Celsius. It was the fourth Friday of Lent. The message that the Pope emphasized was: **"We are on the same boat."** "Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, ... has fallen away,"

Until now, even war could not cause what the pandemic has caused. No one would have ever imagined that St. Peter's Square would turn out like this. At a time when we found our faith weak and ourselves fearful, the world saw the Pope accept what was happening without fear. We saw how he was standing firm in the midst of the storm.

4. Walk with the bishops of Japan in September as the Month for the Protection of All Life

In response to Pope Francis' visit to Japan, the bishops of Japan have designated the period from September 1 to October 4 of each year as the Month for the Protection of All Life" and have decided to implement it immediately, starting this year. In the prayer cards already distributed to each parish, you can read a short explanation by Archbishop Mitsuaki Takami of Nagasaki Diocese, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, on the month. This year we will not be able to call on you as much as we want due to the restrictions on church activities caused by the spread of the new coronavirus, but from next year, we hope to make September an important month as the Month for the Protection of All Life in our diocese. I'd really appreciate the understanding and cooperation of all the priests and deacons.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).