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Bishop's Message for the New Year 2011

**THE LORD WILL KEEP YOU FROM ALL EVIL;
HE WILL KEEP YOUR LIFE. (1)**

**To all my Brothers and Sisters of Saitama Diocese,
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all!**

While the harsh economic recession still seems to linger on, the situations in and around Japan continue to be insecure. These cast a shadow over our living conditions and depress us deeply. However, this is the very time we want to place our hope in God and be assured that He continues to guard us. We pray that this new year be the one in which we can walk together towards true peace.

At the beginning of this year, I would like to share with you two points for reflection: first, concerning children and second, concerning our way of living.

To protect our children

In October last year, a case happened in our neighbourhood—a primary school girl took her own life as a result of being bullied at school. Let us pray together from the bottom of our hearts for the girl and for her bereaved family.

Because of this case, various schools in Japan started to grapple with the issue of bullying. Although it is important to appeal to the society that bullying should not be condoned, however, I think that it is vital to try to grasp its reality and start considering seriously how we can save and protect children from bullying and how we can practically decrease its happening. We should also acknowledge that there is bullying within our Church too.

I often hear that children in our parishes experience bullying at their schools. There are in fact many children, especially those from international marriages, suffering from bullying. Children often find it difficult to tell their families about such experiences. As for the families of these children, especially those immigrated from overseas, they cannot but encounter anxiety and difficulties in trying to talk to the school and the board of education.

What I think we can do is to provide these children and families an environment of consultation

in our parishes or in our pastoral blocks. I feel this is slowly actualizing in our parishes. There are many among you who listen to and stand by these children and families. I hope that these small groups of individuals will expand to a larger size so that we can work as a team to support these children and families together and I also pray that the members of the Church community would support them as brothers and sisters and start to get involved in discussions and in conferences with schools, teachers and local communities.

In the past two years of employment uncertainty with an increasing number of temporary workers fired, I have seen you as the community of the Church members working together to support and help the unemployed and the needy. Likewise, in order to combat bullying, I hope we can combine our strength and work in solidarity with these who suffer.

Revising our way of living

Now, I would ask all of you the following questions: in your daily life, is there a moment you take note of the beauty of little flowers on the roadside or is there a moment you let yourself moved by the scenery? When your children come home from school, do you have time to listen to what they have to tell you? If not, that is a sign of danger.

The contemporary society forces us to live the way that idolizes economic efficiency. Some people may have fear of dropping out of this social cycle. Some among migrants may still try to work this way for their primary purpose to earn money in Japan. Is not this lifestyle becoming too much of a burden for us? With this lifestyle, are we not forgetting to see the beauty of God's Creation?

Even if I say so, in order to survive, we cannot ignore our jobs and our social responsibilities. However, I think we can create some time for repose in our way of living. I would like to make a suggestion to all of you one thing, which is also for myself: to cut your waste by 5% and make your time for 5%. This is not too difficult to practice; for example, reduce the amount of time for chores and instead, have some time to listen to your children. Assuming that the amount of time spent for your chores is eight hours, that 5% would be 24 minutes. You can also try to shorten your overtime work by 5% to make your time. This corresponds to only two hours per week and we could use that much time for ourselves and for our families. We can also make our meals simpler for 5% or we can also lower our consumption of electricity, water and gasoline, by 5%. Within our own capacity and with our own ideas, have "5%" as your goal to reduce your expenditure and waste. Do you not think this 5% goal would lighten our burden and enrich our lives?

In other words, we can live the spirit of poverty by saving anything by 5% in our everyday life. This 5% allows us to retrieve our true and original identity, the image of God, in which we are created. This change frees us to enjoy the time to be with our Lord. Moreover, how wonderful would it be if this change prompts us to welcome into our community the lonely and the isolated children who are bullied, as our brothers and sisters?

Psalms 121 is a song of pilgrims sweating going up to the City of Jerusalem. It starts from the verse: "*I lift up my eyes to the hills*"⁽²⁾ This psalm portrays pilgrims resting while on the mountains.

They look up to the hills and renew their trust in God, hold fast to their hope to continue their journey. If this mountain-climbing were an illustration of our daily life, perhaps we could say that the time of looking up to the hills would be the 5% time of repose I have referred to you in this message.

Let us entrust ourselves to the protection of God and begin this new year together.

† May the Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless you all.

January 1, 2011

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Catholic Diocese of Saitama

Bishop Marcellino TANI Daiji

(1) Psalm 121:7

(2) Psalm 121:1