

## **Homily of Bishop Abella on the occasion of his installation Mass**

Today we have to hold the installation ceremony of the Bishop of Fukuoka under these circumstances. Because of the spread of the coronavirus there was no other way to do it. However, we are united with all the Christians of the Fukuoka diocese with one heart as we gather here today. We unite with all the parishioners, priests and religious, of the diocese and give thanks for their bonds, and ask that our Father in heaven shows us how to walk together and bestows his blessings upon us.

Also, I welcome Archbishop Takami who shows us the unity not only of the dioceses of Kyushu but the unity of the whole church in Japan. Archbishop Takami, thank you. Also, I want to thank the former bishop of the diocese of Fukuoka Bishop Miyahara Ryoji and the auxiliary bishop of Nagasaki Bishop Nakamura from the bottom of my heart.

Let's think about the words of the Scripture that we heard today, and see if we can see some light in them as to how we are to proceed from now on. We read about a certain episode in the Gospel of John. We are all familiar with this passage. It's the passage of a meeting of the resurrected Christ and Peter. In that passage three people come on stage.

That is, Jesus going to the place where his disciples are, to meet them. After having breakfast with them, he asks Peter a question "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Jesus asks this question three times. This emphasizes the importance of the question.

The second one is Peter, who at the last supper for the sake of Jesus, and just a few hours later denied him three times. Jesus was crucified and died; Jesus was gone. Peter thinks all he can do is return to his former life, and goes back to his native place. But the joy of meeting Jesus again prompts a humble reply from Peter. "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." An act of faith coming from a heart purified by trial.

And lastly the men and women whom Jesus brings always in his heart. As it is recorded in the gospel of John at the record of the last supper, "he loved them with great love",

to such extent of giving his own life for them. Jesus calls them “my sheep”. He asks Peter to feed them. Peter is prepared now. Having experienced his own weakness and at the same time Jesus’ deep compassion in a new way. As the gospel of Luke states, Jesus looked with deep compassion at Peter who had denied knowing him for three times. This was an experience that brought peace and reconciliation to Peter’s heart. Now Peter understands the meaning of human weakness. This is why Jesus says to him “look after my sheep”. In reality, this is the very same call Jesus made to Peter when they first met on the banks of lake Galilee: “Come follow me, I’ll make you fisher of men”.

In this conversation between Peter and Jesus, we can find the basic attitude that Peter and in the same way all those who are called to serve the community are asked for: be deeply united with Jesus and ready to give their life for other people, to offer everything for the sake of other people.

As we just read in Paul’s letter to Timothy this type of life style is not possible by our own strength but only through the grace of God. We also just read in the prophet Isaiah, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor”. This is the Spirit of love and compassion who filled the heart of the Father. This is the Spirit of love and compassion that filled the heart of Jesus. When we open our hearts to this Spirit, we will be ready to become the shepherds that Jesus wants. Led by this Spirit we will be able to open our hearts and minister to the suffering people, the oppressed people and the poor, and to announce the Gospel to everybody, responding to the invitation of Jesus.

Being strongly united with Jesus, a deep and compassionate love for the people will grow in our hearts. A true pastor needs these two loves: love for Jesus and love for the people. Several years ago, in a symposium about consecrated life, a short definition was given to explain the essence of this type of life: a life characterized by a deep “passion for Christ and passion for humanity”. In today’s second reading from the letter of Paul to Timothy the demands of this passionate life are portrayed. I want to take these words to heart.

I meditated on these Scripture texts last week. What is it that the Lord wants me to put at the centre of my life as bishop of Fukuoka diocese? I meditated on this before the Lord several times. Finally, I came to this very conclusion: “passion for Christ and passion for the people” Paul says the same thing in other words to Timothy, “For this reason I invite you to fan into a flame the gift of God you received through the laying on of my hands.”

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (The joy of proclaiming the Gospel) states, “To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize the Jesus’ gaze, burning with love expands to embrace all his people. We realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. He takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity” (no. 268). In this way, spurred on by Christ’s love I want to journey together with all the members of the community. Our community has the mission given to it by the Lord of proclaiming his kingdom in the midst of our society. It is my deep desire to respond faithfully to this mission. Again, I quote Pope Francis “Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing the Church grows, but “by attraction” (no.15).

Let’s aim at this kind of Church, in which laity, religious, priests and bishop walk together. For that let’s pray from our hearts for the grace of the Spirit.

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