

"PROTECT ALL LIFE"

Fukuoka, August 21, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters:

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

I am sure that the memory of Pope Francis' visit to Japan last November will remain very alive on in each one of us. With immense joy we welcomed the Pope and the message he brought: "Protect all life." We were blessed by a special experience of communion with the Pope during those four days.

Both through the proximity of the Pope in his encounter with people and through his words we were able to discover the light of the Gospel. What scenes from the visit or what words of those spoken by the Pope have been most strongly engraved in your hearts? Hope, Peace, Solidarity, Nuclear disarmament, Non-violence, Human rights, Love, Mercy, Testimony... are some of these words. On each one of them we were able to hear from the Pope, both a deep reflection on their meaning and the clarification of the demands they entail when making them come true. It will be good to reread them and rethink them so that they may penetrate deeply in our hearts. Those are the words that will guide our ecclesial journey.

"Protect all life" is a message that the Pope has been repeating constantly. Life is the greatest gift we have received from God. As the Pope reminds us, welcoming it with gratitude and committing to protect and care for it must be the foundation of the value system, thought and conduct of each person. Pope Francis insists on this in a special way in the encyclical "Laudato Si" that he published in 2015. It is something that is deeply related to respect for human rights, justice, peace, and the care of creation.

When we look at the reality of our world, we discover many situations that cause us deep pain. For this reason, Pope Francis speaks to us of the need for a "conversion", an "ecological conversion". To better understand this expression, it is good to remember the etymology of the word "ecological". Its root is Greek: OIKOS, which means house, and LOGOS, which means word-wisdom. It is, therefore, the wisdom to maintain the harmony of the house. And, since "the house belongs to everyone", it is about the need to protect its harmony and beauty so that everyone can find their place in it.

The bishops of Japan, responding to this message from the Pope and with the intention of commemorating his visit, have decided to establish the period of time that goes from September 1 to October 4 of each year, as a time of special commitment to the protection of life. In the letter of presentation of this initiative, the President of the Bishops' Conference of Japan, Mgr. Takami, writes: "to protect life, it is important to assume a change in the lifestyle and in the daily conduct of people. Therefore, especially during this month, all members of the Church of Japan will try to deepen the awareness of the sacredness of life and, together with other groups and people in our society, especially with young people, we will make an effort to carry out some specific activity in this regard".

These activities can be multiple, because, as the letter from the Bishops' Conference says, recalling the words of Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si*, "we consider the ecological question from a global perspective that reveals its deep connection with social problems, human rights and justice".

The message of the Bishops' Conference offers some concrete suggestions. In the Diocese of Fukuoka I ask each parish, school or social action center, religious communities and different diocesan groups to try to take up the call for the celebration of this special month to "protect all life" within their programs. You can do it according to the circumstances of each place or activity. Due to the COVID-19 situation, it is not possible to organize anything at the diocesan level. For this reason, I ask that, in the parishes and other centers, as well as in the personal level, some concrete activity be organized. You can use some of the suggestions in the letter from the Bishops' Conference or plan something on your own initiative.

I implore the Lord's blessing upon each of you.

Fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josep M. Abella". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Josep M. Abella
Bishop of Fukuoka