

Kyo.Prot.N. 64/2020

A Message to Our Catechumens from Bishop Otsuka, 2020

Dear Catechumens,

We were all looking forward to your baptism at Easter and I am sure you are disappointed that the suspension of Masses because of the coronavirus pandemic prevented that. Masses will resume in each block of the diocese, and your baptismal ceremony will certainly take place. Please be patient a little longer.

In 2019 our diocese celebrated the baptisms of 198 infants and 143 adults. This year our annual gathering of new believers was canceled, but I look forward to seeing you next year. In the meantime, I want to greet you as new members of the community of the Kyoto Diocese, and as the bishop of Kyoto I say to you all, Welcome!

You have been chosen by God to receive the sacraments of initiation. This divine choice has two purposes. God chooses you receive the grace of faith and chooses you as well to give witness to the Gospel. There is no way that we can think of these two separately.

Perhaps some of you may worry that after you have been baptized you might not continue to live this new life and believe in God for the rest of your life, or that you might cast off your faith along the way.

However, if we think carefully about it, we realize that the determination to believe in God cannot be created by human power. The gift of faith is a grace. God takes the initiative and through the Holy Spirit touches hearts to awaken them to the truth that "I am created and loved by God." From ancient times, catechumens have been called "enlightened ones." Faith is not the result of human efforts, rather It is the grace that shines forth from people who are enlightened by God.

The second purpose of God's choice is to bring us into the Church community, "the instrument of salvation." Christians are given the vocation to work for the salvation of all people. This is the purpose of the sacrament of Confirmation. We are united with

each other in Christ in order to witness to the Gospel. Please treasure this fellowship and especially the best experience of the faith community, the Mass.

Never forget the trust and expectations that the Lord Christ holds for each of us. As you reflect upon your vocation as a believer please consider how you will live in the future to meet the trust and expectations of Christ. Even after our baptism, we all are still subject to many trials in our lives, sometimes facing dire and incomprehensible events. At times we are unable to feel the joy of faith, and instead suffer much pain and sorrow. But even at such times, the Lord will be by us through the Holy Spirit, the "helper," and we shall not be abandoned. As missionaries of God's love, embraced by that love, please turn toward the people around you who suffer despair and sadness and serve them not merely with words, but with deeds of saving love.

Congratulations on your baptism.

Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020

✠ **Paul Yoshinao Otsuka**

Bishop of Kyoto