

## PASTORAL MESSAGE OF BISHOP OSAMU MIZOBE

### JOURNEYING TOWARD EVANGELIZING MISSION

For two years now we have focused on “Unity” here in the Takamatsu Diocese. For that reason we concentrated on setting up an administrative structure in the diocese that would have the Bishop as its center. We have been able to reach that goal to a certain extent, and now have the kind of structure suitable for a diocese. In order to make it possible for such a structure to work, however, we need “Help from Above”. We understood that we needed a rich spiritual life. That is why we designated this past year as “The Year of the Eucharist”. Given life by the Eucharist, the Diocese of Takamatsu has journeyed towards its goal. In the second pastoral message of the previous year, I emphasized especially the importance of the Sunday Eucharist. Until now, however, our emphasis has been almost entirely a process of looking inward regarding our position in the Church. In this third year of my mandate among you I wish to propose a further step as our objective - “Looking Outward toward Evangelizing Mission”. Filled within by the Holy Spirit, a Church that is united will be filled with an overflowing energy. There are endless possibilities for what we can do here in the four prefectures of Shikoku. What is the position of the Catholic Church in Shikoku?

#### 1. From an Institutional Church to a Communal Church

When we hear the word “church”, the association that first comes to mind is a building with a steeple where priests and religious live and work, and where the Eucharist is celebrated. Or we may associate the word “church” with the institutional Church as found in Rome, the Bishops’ Conference, or even the Bishop and the Diocesan Office. We are told nowadays that organized religion has lost its vitality and, unable to grasp the hearts of its people, is falling into decline. In contrast, what are known as the “New Religions” do not depend on the organizational aspect, but rather establish relationships on a one to one basis, and are actively involved in the problems of the present day. For those reasons they are on a road of rapid growth. Be that as it may, we cannot deny that traditional religions have lost their strength.

When we talk about traditional religions, we include the Catholic Church, which has a very long tradition. Is it not true that we personally feel deeply that these problems are also our concern? The absence of youth in our churches, the small number of people attending the Sunday liturgy, the paucity of Baptisms, the lack of vocations to the priesthood and religious life - all these facts call us to critical reflection.

When we try to think of ways to deal with these problems, however, we seem to be stranded on a reef with all options lost. At that time there are those who heedlessly speak only of their memories of the past, those who fall into the trap of pessimism, those who put all their energy into reforming the working of the Church by making it more bureaucratic, and those who treat the problems of the present-day world only as a social critic would. I do not feel that any of these methods are the way to bring about a hopeful and bright future.

The Second Vatican Council urged us to dialogue with present-day society. And every Pope since that time has placed great importance on various forms of dialogue. The Catholic Church has shown its willingness to dialogue on political, cultural and religious levels. Good examples of such dialogue are the dialogue for Christian Unity and inter-religious dialogue. In 1996 the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue issued a document entitled "Dialogue and Proclamation", in which the ways to dialogue with other religions are succinctly explained. Pope John Paul II explains dialogue in four steps.

#### 1) Dialogue in Daily Life

We cannot begin our evangelizing mission unless we are able to dialogue with the people we live with. We share what we believe first of all with them. It is not necessary to look upon evangelization as a difficult action. It begins with how we are with the people around us. Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God cannot be realized in a house divided against itself. Let us begin first of all by taking a second look at how we are with the people closest to us.

#### 2) Dialogue through Practical Action

Many good people live and work among us. Many of them are committed to building a better society. There are many people who try to help

the weaker members of our society by engaging in volunteer work and activities. Many young people wish to dedicate their youth to helping others. This year a very large number of people with rich experience will retire from the work-force and are eager to contribute their know-how to society. Is there not something we can do with the groups I have just mentioned? Does the Church not have something to offer them that will give even more value to their lives? Is it not time for us to think of ways that we can involve such people in what we do? As long as our only concern from beginning to end is the workings of our parish church and the personal relationships within that church community, we will not be open to the wider view of evangelizing mission. Dialogue through Practical Action presupposes that we are ready to answer to the needs of the other. This way of acting will change our concept of mission from one of imposition of "preconceived methods of evangelization".

### 3) Theological Dialogue

When we hear the word "theology", we tend to think that we are dealing with difficult concepts. In reality it is the way that we put into words what our deepest convictions are. What is most important for us at this time is to have a message that we are convinced of and that we can explain in words that we believe in. This means that we have a message that we want to promulgate. If we have something that we think is wonderful, we want to spread it around and it will thus be transmitted to those we encounter. It is important to be able to put what one believes into one's own words. Our Church often makes the mistake of using expressions that are largely Western in origin or full of Christian vocabulary. We have to learn to speak a language that people can understand. It is a question of being able to put into our own words what we hear and learn in church. Presently we have begun a process of dialogue with Buddhists here in Shikoku. Even if we use the same word, it can have different meanings when we are dealing with another religion. We have begun our dialogue by investigating the meaning of such words.

When we speak of Theological Dialogue, besides the importance of

having convictions ourselves, it is important also to understand the convictions of the other. An important point in evangelizing mission is to know what the other is thinking and what he or she desires. It is not a question of imposing one's convictions on the other, but rather a process of dialogue where one begins from where the other is at the present time. Taking this position ensures the development of a warm relationship that fosters mutual confidence. In our evangelizing mission we need to move from "I'll teach you" to "Listening to the other".

#### 4) Dialogue in Prayer

From our recent efforts in the diocese in offering different courses in Christianity and projects for youth, there is one thing that always puzzles me. It is that it is usually the same people that attend. They are already members of our Church and seem to be satisfied that people gather for such occasions. My simple question is why we do not invite other people we associate with to join us in such activities. Perhaps the reason why we do not have the words to invite other people is because we do not put our faith into words even to ourselves. Even when we respect where the other is at the present time, we can offer them the chance to think about the faith we already have. Perhaps we are satisfied to pray by ourselves, or not to go beyond prayer that is turned inward on the members of our church. It could be a question of not being aware of what people around us are searching for. If we were able to speak to even one person, we would experience great reward.

Prayer is one of the principal foundations of religion. In order to be able to speak to others about religion, we need to be firmly rooted in prayer. Our prayer must be part of our daily lives. Praying for the people we encounter each day, praying through the events that happen each day in our lives, reading something spiritual each day are some of the ways we can use to become more spiritual and to become a person who is sincerely considerate of others. Our daily lives are the vehicle of our mission. Praying for the people we meet each day, and being kind and considerate to each person we meet is the essence of our prayer and the source of our energy for mission.

## 2. Efforts to Vitalize the Institution Itself

In the Catholic Church there are many different institutions and projects. In Shikoku we have 23 Catholic Kindergartens and 3 schools. We have 7 institutions answering to social needs – hospitals, and homes for the aged and for children. There are projects to help victims of domestic violence and people addicted to alcohol, as well as Lifeline. Pro-Life, and many other social actions. Any one of these is an important work for society. It is not easy to maintain institutions in this day and age. In our schools and institutions for social work, I realize that answering the needs of the present day is very demanding for the people who administer them. I also understand how much patience and energy one must have in order to maintain such institutions. If we are not careful, however, in our effort to answer present-day needs, there is a danger that we will end up paying too much attention to the business end of matters, and forget that we have a mission to fulfill. In other words our efforts to maintain the institution itself can cause us to forget the very reason for its foundation – evangelizing mission. Especially for those engaged in social work, if too much attention is paid to present-day social problems, the first reason for the foundation of that institution – the spreading of the Gospel – may be set aside.

I am not saying that we do not need such institutions. What I am asking is that each institution reaffirm its gospel-oriented focus and make the institution a place where the Gospel is promulgated. It is not enough to administer institutions. What is important is how we use them to spread the teachings of Jesus. The institution needs to be a place full of the joy of the Gospel, where the people who come there hear the words of the Gospel, where the people who work there are witnesses of the Gospel – those are the important aspects of a Catholic institution. It is not a question of throwing away the structural organization, but rather of questioning how that structure can be vitalized for mission. We personally have to start with the Bishop's House and the Diocesan Office. We need to make it a central structure that is there to answer the needs of the whole diocese.

### 3. The Central Role of the Christian People for Mission

For a long time in the Catholic Church our image was one church - one priest assisted by consecrated religious ministering to the Christian people. The Second Vatican Council, however, emphasized the role of lay Christians. Through Baptism each person is called to share in the priesthood of Christ. The role of a priest is to know and bring to God the desires, sufferings and cries of the people on earth. The priest also has the role of carrying God's grace and message to the people. On the other hand, the person who knows best the sufferings of the people of society is the one who lives in their midst - a baptized Christian. That is why such a person is best prepared to bring their cries to God. One of the reasons we come to church each week is to carry the cries of our people to church and with one's own personal prayer offer them to God. We also come in order to be able to transmit God's message to others.

I have made Christian History my main area of study. In researching the Church of 400 years ago, I have been amazed at the degree of independence of the Christian people. A very small number of priests did what only a priest can do - celebrate the Eucharist and forgive sins. It was the Christian people who kept the church community together. They had what we call "kumi" (a Japanese word for a team or small group). The head of the "kumi" was attentive to the material and spiritual needs of the people. They were witnesses at weddings, ministered at funerals, baptized, and gave Holy Communion. At celebrations of the Word on Sundays they interpreted the Scripture readings and led the prayers. Most of the Baptisms of that period were due to their efforts. Unfortunately, as time went on, the structure of the churches changed to one with the priest as its center. At the moment I cannot develop this idea further, but in my next pastoral message I will use material from the Christian era to explain "Collaborative Ministry", which is one of the practical initiatives we are presently working on in the diocese.