

## **NEW YEAR PASTORAL LETTER OF BISHOP OSAMU MIZOBE**

### **The Neocatechumenal Way**

To the Clergy, Religious and Faithful of the Diocese of Takamatsu

At the beginning of this New Year I send you greetings. I pray that this year you will journey with me, your Bishop, to bring about “Rebirth and Unity” in our diocese.

Last year on December 13, 2010, having received a message from the Vatican Secretariat of State that they wished to have a discussion regarding the Neocatechumenal Way, I went to Rome with three other Bishops from Japan. We presumed that we would meet around a table with the Holy Father, Secretary of State, Cardinal Bertone, and Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Cardinal Dias. When we arrived at our hotel, however, we were advised that the place and time of our meeting had been changed and that the Holy Father, 5 Cardinals and 1 Archbishop (Undersecretary of the Secretariat of State) would be in attendance. To our surprise Bishop Hirayama was also included in the meeting, which proceeded with the aid of simultaneous translation. I will not go into detail about the contents of the meeting. In the January 2 and January 16, 2011 editions of the Catholic Newspaper of Japan there is an article regarding the meeting and there is also concrete information in Catholic channels on the internet about the content of the meeting.

At the end of the year and at the beginning of this year many of the clergy and Christian people of the diocese asked for a report of the meeting in Rome. I was asked what the future policy of the Diocese of Takamatsu would be regarding the Neocatechumenal Way. I also received the painful admonition that maintaining the position of “not knowing, not being told” would not be admissible. On the internet both in Japan and internationally, the fact that the Bishops of Japan were called to Rome has been widely reported. You can read on the Internet that the Archdiocese of Clifton in England forbade all activities of the “Way” and that the Bishops’ Conference of Palestine has published a document asking the Neocatechumenal Way to practice self-control in their activities. Recently the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan in the Philippines announced that an inspection of the Neocatechumenal Way in the archdiocese would be carried out. Comments in Italian, Spanish and English regarding articles about the “Way” are readily available on the internet. What such articles tell us clearly is that problems with the Neocatechumenal Way are not exclusive to the Diocese of Takamatsu and the Church in Japan. The whole world is paying

attention to the Church in Japan. Because of the seriousness of this issue, I made the decision to report clearly to you what has taken place and to explain to you the policy of our diocese.

After returning from Rome, the Papal Nuncio asked to have a meeting with us on December 23. Archbishop Okada of Tokyo and three Bishops attended the meeting. We were told that there was a strong possibility that a special envoy of the Holy Father would be sent to Japan. Until that time, however, with regard to the activities of the “Way”, it was agreed that each Bishop is free to proceed as he sees fit for his diocese.

At the meeting in Rome the four Bishops from Japan emphasized that this problem is concerned with the disciplinary laws of the diocese and as such is under the jurisdiction of the local ordinary. We emphasized that the fact that the Neocatechumenal Way has been approved by Rome does not automatically imply that a local diocese must accept them. We also emphasized the fact that the person who understands the situation of the local church best is its Bishop and that any decisions made in Rome should begin with a discussion with the local ordinaries. The opinions of the Cardinals in attendance were diverse, and the meeting was simply an expression of the opinion of each person present rather than a discussion. It was clear that the fact that the Bishops’ Conference of Japan made the decision to suspend the activities of the Neocatechumenal “Way” is a big problem for the Vatican. It was necessary, therefore, to think of a plan of action. In this regard the Holy Father stated that he would think positively about sending a special envoy of the Holy Father to Japan.

The special envoy from the Vatican will surely come to our diocese. If we look at the reverse side of the decision that it is necessary to send a special envoy, we realize how wide the fissure in our diocese is. Besides, this is the second time such an envoy has come. In 2003 Cardinal Kim from Korea was sent as a special envoy to our diocese and after his visit he compiled a detailed report. In that report he analyzed the situation in the diocese and proposed ways to remedy the situation. Cardinal Dias, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, said that the envoy will be sent to hear the opinions of the Christian people of the diocese. Until this time I have tried to deal with the problem of the Neocatechumenal Way as quietly as possible and without making public statements. I was waiting for the members of the Neocatechumenal Way to decide for themselves to use self-discipline in their activities. Now that this problem has become a worldwide issue, however, I cannot wait any longer. After I came back from Rome I realized that I have an obligation to speak to the people of the

diocese. If the people of the diocese do not have information about the situation, when the envoy comes, there is a possibility that they would refuse to speak out or end up affecting ignorance because they had not been informed, and the result would be that the envoy would leave the diocese without a true grasp of the situation.

As Bishop of the Diocese of Takamatsu I have come to the following conclusion regarding the issue of the Neocatechumenal Way. This problem is one that concerns the local Church, namely the Diocese of Takamatsu. It is an issue that can only be settled here in the diocese. The Holy Father and the Prefects of the Congregations agree that this is a problem of the local Church and that it is the Bishop who must settle it. It is not permissible for any organization or movement to use whatever power they can to stop the Bishop from taking action in his diocese. It is important for all of us to earnestly and seriously face the events that have occurred in our diocese for the past 20 years and are still happening. This is not the time to devote oneself only to the interests of one's group but rather a time to think of ways that one can be of service to the diocese. In our diocese, gathered around our Bishop, we are standing at an important turning point in the road towards true "Rebirth and Unity".

The conclusion I have come to is that, until we have received the results of the visit of the special envoy of the Holy Father, I ask you to suspend all activities of the Neocatechumenal Way in the diocese. This decision has been approved by both the Presbytery Council and the Pastoral Council of the diocese. It is not a decision that means that dialogue has ended but rather an opportunity for reflection for all of us. When a process goes amiss it is said that one should always return to the starting point. I believe that "NOW" is a good time for us to return to the starting point. This decision does not mean that the members of the Neocatechumenal Way are excluded from the diocese. My wish is that we use this time of reflection to make true dialogue possible. I respect the members of the Neocatechumenal Way and hope that they will take an active part in the activities of the diocese. I wish also that all the people of the diocese play an active role in the three-year process we have begun in order to revitalize our diocese. There is not one person in the diocese that can be exempted from playing a part in this process.

January 20, 2011

Osamu Mizobe,  
Bishop of the Diocese of Takamatsu