

Heart Beats



Newsletter Of The International Community Of Sacred Heart Cathedral

April - May 2015

“May the words of our mouths (and those we write) and the meditations of our hearts, be pleasing in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer” - Psalm 19:14

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Parishioner and Visitor,

Easter completes the journey we made from Ash Wednesday throughout Lent until Good Friday. Now begins the wonderful season wherein we celebrate the triumph of Jesus over sin and death through his resurrection.

Pope Leo I called Easter “festum fetorum” which means the “greatest feast”. Indeed, it is the biggest feast of the Church because we are an Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song! It is not the cross that is the center of our faith but the resurrection of Jesus. It is not the suffering and death, but the life He gives. So let us echo the same joy and hope the apostles and witnesses experienced as they faced their mission during their time. Christ is Risen! Indeed, He lives! Alleluia.



Christ is Risen! He came to give us hope! Jesus destroyed death, opened up for us the rewards of eternal life and the welcoming love of the Father once again. As that lovely hymn goes,
*“Because He lives, I can face tomorrow; Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know he holds the future; And life is worth the living
Just because He lives...”*

And as His followers, all our trials, deprivations and persecutions lead to something beautiful and enduring because what is done for Christ lasts. This truth gave the apostles the faith and grace to rise above fear and boldly continue the mission of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. May we also do the same, for it is hope that we freely received and it is that same hope we must freely give!

Christ is Risen! He came to give us joy! “They have seen something beyond lions and death”. Those were the comments used to describe the first Christians when they were seen singing psalms and joyful songs in the face of their martyrdom! Let us lay hold of that grace that the first Christians had. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and destroy; but I have come that you may have life in abundance” (John 10:10). The Bible Concordance describes this abundant life as a rich, satisfying and joyful life. Even on the road marked with suffering, may we have a “joyful” courage! Pope Francis is often quoted saying that the “church is not a refuge for sad people but the church is a house of joy”. In his recent letter, ‘*Evangelii Gaudium*’, 263, Pope Francis writes: “Let us not say then, that things are harder today; they simply are different. But let us learn from the saints who have gone before us, who confronted the difficulties of their own day.”

Christ is Risen! He came to give us a mission! His triumph reminds us that goodness shall always prevail over evil and sin. Loving will prevail over indifference. Peace will bring end to wars and deprivation. Forgiveness will reign over hatred. So let us make Easter a reality everyday by challenging ourselves again and again to persevere in living as His disciples and doing good in this world. St John of the Cross reminds us that there is so much goodness and love in this world but it always begins with one's own self. He said, “Where there is no love, put on love and you will find love”.

May we also continue in this mission of bringing out goodness and doing good in this world, especially as a church community to which we belong despite our many differences.

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Bishop of the Diocese	: Most Rev. Raphael Umemura, DD
Parish Administrator	: Fr Keisuke Suzuki
Parish Assistant	: Fr Roed Desamparado, CM
Mass Schedule (Japanese)	: Daily Mass at 07:00 on weekdays : Sunday Mass at 07:30 & 11:30 : Sunday Mass at 18:00 on Saturdays
Mass Schedule (English)	: Sunday Mass at 09:30
Mass Schedule (Spanish)	: Sunday Mass at 14:00 on the second Sunday of every month (except August)



More than a decade ago, well-loved Fr Joseph Wellens encouraged every one of us in this church saying:

"We, you and I, can create a new beginning, if we say "I believe in the Risen Lord" and mean it. This future is not utopia, it will not come without struggle or pain, because there will always be laziness, indifference, intolerance, misunderstanding and injustice, but if we truly believe in the risen Christ, we will have the strength and fire to face them and eventually destroy them." Because Christ is God.

Happy Easter & Happy Feast of the Divine Mercy!

Fr Roed Desamparado



Parish News & Events

Holy Week & Easter

Lent this year saw the 'Stations of the Cross' being held in collaboration with the Japanese congregation and was held, therefore, in English as well as in Japanese.

As in yester years, Holy Week services too were held jointly with the Japanese community. The difference was that this year, the Good Friday service was held mostly in English with the international community taking the lead in organizing everything. This drastically increased the numbers of those attending the service from the international community. The Maundy Thursday service and the Easter Vigil were held mostly in Japanese.

After the English Mass on Easter Sunday, an Egg Hunt was organized for the children of our parish in the church kindergarten yard. Despite the weather, the children came along to search for the eggs and gleefully went home with their bags full.



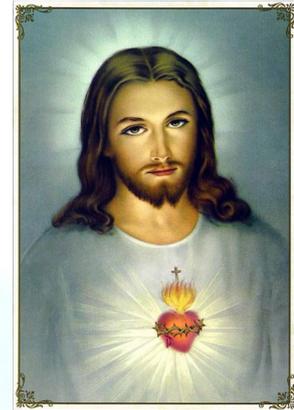
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Prayer of Consecration To The Sacred Heart Of Jesus

- Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque



I give myself and consecrate to the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, my person and my life, my actions, pains and sufferings, so that I may be unwilling to make use of any part of my being other than to honour, love and glorify the Sacred Heart. This is my unchanging purpose, namely, to be all His, and to do all things for the love of Him, at the same time renouncing with all my heart whatever is displeasing to Him.

I therefore take You, O Sacred Heart, to be the only object of my love, the guardian of my life, my assurance of salvation, the remedy of my weakness and inconstancy, the atonement for all the faults of my life and my sure refuge at the hour of death.

Be then, O Heart of goodness, my justification before God the Father, and turn away from me the strokes of his righteous anger. O Heart of love, I put all my confidence in You, for I fear everything from my own wickedness and frailty, but I hope for all things from Your goodness and bounty.

Remove from me all that can displease You or resist Your holy will; let your pure love imprint Your image so deeply upon my heart, that I shall never be able to forget You or be separated from You.

May I obtain from all Your loving kindness the grace of having my name written in Your Heart, for in You I desire to place all my happiness and glory, living and dying in bondage to You.

Sweet Heart of Jesus, make my heart like unto Thine! Amen.

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Mission Outreach



You will recall that we had made a collection for the charity, 'Little Children of the Philippines' during Advent 2014. The total amount we collected converted into 45,709 pesos. This donation will go a long way in meeting the needs of the women and children this charity supports. The people from this NGO have sent the international community at Sacred Heart a 'thank you' card and have expressed their sincere gratitude and appreciation for our whole hearted support.

To All the people at the church who helped us.
Thank you very much for helping us to have an additional income; means of supporting our livelihood here in LCP (Little Children of the Philippines). your help give us more opportunities to have a better life and brighter future for our children.
God bless you and shower more blessings.

Lenten Recollection

Our parish lenten recollection on "The Dedicated Life" was held on March 8 at the Xavier Centre. This was conducted by Fr Alfred Burke, a former parish priest at Sacred Heart.

Fr Roed began the recollection with a time of collective prayer which was followed by a short talk by Fr Burke after which we broke up into groups for a group discussion on how we could live dedicated lives. The topics that the groups came up with ranged from prayer life and charity to finances, family and lifestyle. Fr Burke ended the two hour session by detailing the ways in which we could do charity in Yokohama itself.

We thank Fr Burke for his "dedication". May God continue to be his guiding light!

The Chapel of the Infant Jesus : Saint Maur International School

Located in the basement area of the Fine Arts Building of Saint Maur International School, the Chapel of the Infant Jesus is an oasis of quiet and peace. The dedication plaque at the entrance reads: "The Chapel of the Infant Jesus, named after the congregation of sisters who founded Saint Maur International School in 1872, is dedicated to Sister Carmel O'Keeffe, in thanksgiving for her many years of service to the school, church and the Yokohama community". Sister Carmel passed away in 2011, and so this chapel remains a memorial to her life and work.

The chapel was blessed by the Apostolic Pro-nuncio to Japan, Archbishop William Aquin Crew, in August 1998. The Fine Arts Building and chapel was the work of A&T Associates, the main architect being Haruyaki Sasaki. The architect's concept for the chapel was influenced by the Zen Japanese tradition where straight lines and a simple clean space provides a sense of calm.

It is here that our community members of all faiths feel free to spend time to pause and reflect. It is here that school gatherings are held to begin the new school year and to note other important occasions. As part of the Catholic tradition, mass is regularly celebrated here and other sacraments, such as baptisms and confirmations, also take place here. Those who have special ties to the school may have their marriage ceremony in the school chapel.

The chapel also keeps a Book of Remembrance, which we update each November, recording the names of our loved ones who have gone before us into eternal life. There is also a large Easter Candle which is broken in three places, the result of the Great East Japan earthquake in March 2011. This candle is a reminder to us of those whose lives were broken as a result of the earthquake and tsunami. Finally one cannot miss noticing the large framed Japanese calligraphy to the right of the altar. This was the work of Yanagida Taizan and represents the word for God and the symbol of unity of all living things, which is the message of our chapel, and a place for everyone to feel welcome.

Brendan Agnew



Parish News & Events



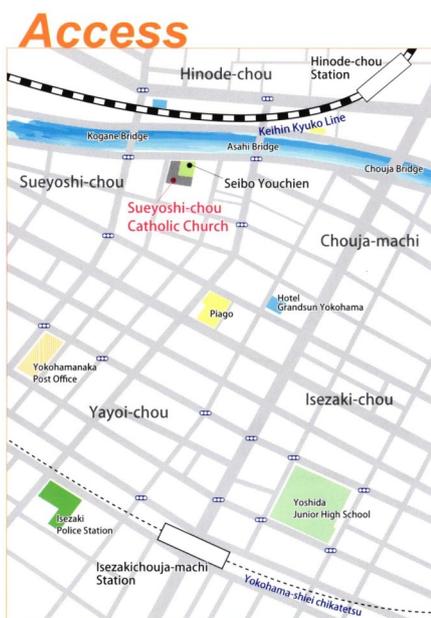
You can take part in what we are doing by . . .

- Accompanying migrants to ward office, lawyers, etc.
- Visiting hospitals and detention centers
- Helping in the translation of documents
- Helping the Secretariat in sending newsletter

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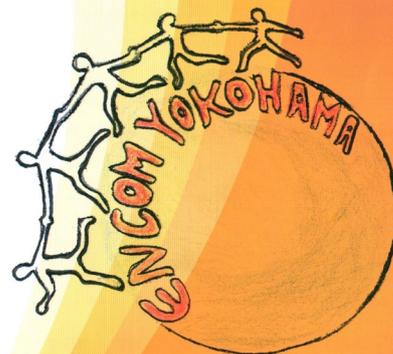
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ENCOM YOKOHAMA Yokohama Diocesan Commission on Refugees, Migrants and People on the Move



ENcounter . . .
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Beginnings . . .

In 1990 the Diocese of Yokohama formally realized the need to work towards a Japanese society where all people whatever their origin and nationalities, can live together in harmony.

With the recognition of the need, the decision to work for migrants living in Japan was born.

More than twenty years have passed since then. The situation of migrants has gone through different stages. Also the names and structures under which the Diocese of Yokohama has been serving them have changed several times. To this day, the Diocese following the call of Jesus continues to work for the realization of this aim.

Our Mission . . .

Working towards a society where people can live together, beyond differences of race and nationality and aiming at building a community of brothers and sisters where our human dignity as children of God is respected.

Training and Education

- Spiritual Formation and Review of Values
- Identity Awareness
- Leadership Training
- Migration Issues
- Mission Awareness
- Tutorial Support for Children
- Japanese Class

Assistance and Counseling

- Daily Life problems
- Labor Problems
- Problem on Cross-cultural Marriages and Family
- Medical
- Documentation
- Visa/Arrest/Detention

Apostleship of the Sea (AOS)

- Attending to the needs of Seafarers and creating awareness about their conditions

Community Building

- Creating Channels of Communication & Information
- Networking Among Different Communities and Other Migrants' Supporting Organizations



Social Advocacy

- Human rights awareness & involvement in the promotion and protection of the human dignity of migrants & their families





Continued from the last issue.....

The Patriarchs 1

By the end of the Early World period, Adam and Eve's descendants had spread throughout the known world. For the rest of the book of Genesis (which narrates the period of the patriarchs), the story focuses on one man, Abraham, with whom God establishes an everlasting promise of blessing. His descendants will be God's chosen people, Israel, and through them God will bless the entire world. The story of the patriarchs' period is full of action and many memorable stories, some of them central not just to Israel's history but to Christian history as well. If reading Genesis 12-50 is too much, try reading one or more of the following vignettes.

- † Genesis 12:1-9 God calls Abram out of Ur
- † Genesis 15, 17, 22 God's covenant with Abraham
- † Genesis 25:19-34 Jacob and Esau
- † Genesis 29:1-30:24 Jacob gets married; Jacob's children
- † Genesis 32:22-32 Jacob wrestles with God and gets a new name
- † Genesis 37-50 Joseph and his brothers: to get just the gist of the story, focus on 37 and 41-44

Sometime between 2000 and 1850 BC, God called a man named Abram from the ancient city of Ur, a place in the southern part of Mesopotamia (an immense valley between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and modern day Iraq) to leave his clan and relatives and to move northwest with his wife towards a land called Canaan. God, a deity yet unknown and without a face, promises Abram that his descendants will own land with plenty of milk and honey; that is, a land in the middle of a deserted area where cattle can graze in green fields and where flowers attract plenty of bees. God also promises him that kings and kingdoms will come out from his loins and that nations worldwide will be blessed. "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you." (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham, who is childless, leaves his world and follows this new quest through the city of Haran in the north and then to Hebron in the south. Later after the birth of Ismael, his son from Hagar, the handmaid of his wife Sarai, Abram reminds God "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Or can Sarah give birth at ninety?" (Gen 17: 17). God, after having changed their names to Abraham and Sarah and renewing his covenant with Abraham tells him simply, "Is anything too marvellous for the Lord to do?" (Gen 18 :14) Fecundity will come to Rachel - the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, to Anna - the mother of Samuel, Elizabeth - the mother of John the Baptist and to Mary - the mother of Jesus. Nothing is impossible for God. All through salvation history, the Lord asks his chosen ones: "Do you really trust me? Do not be afraid. Nothing is impossible for me."

The faith of Abraham is amazing. God puts him to the test: to prove his faith in God's promise that through his son Isaac all the nations of the earth will find blessing, God tells Abraham : "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you." (Gen 22: 2) Sacrificing one's child was still a not so uncommon ritual seen in other religions. However, God intervenes in verse 12: "Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son... I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing, all this because you obeyed my command."

Here, I cannot but help thinking about another Father who did not withhold his own beloved Son to prove His love. "In this way, the love of God was revealed to us; God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins." (1 John 4: 9-10.)

Lord God, I praise you and thank you for the example of Abraham. He did not have anyone ahead of him to explain to him who you were when you met him and chose him to become the father of many nations. Be praised Lord, for your desire to befriend us, to love us and to fill our lives with joy and peace. I praise you for your Son Jesus, my brother, who was obedient to you and who came to show us how much you love us, how to love you and how to love each other. I thank you Lord for your unfathomable love, for your endless mercy, for your infinite kindness. Thank you Lord.

Br Michel Beaudin





Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska (1905 ~ 1938; Feast ~ October 5)



Sr Faustina was a young, uneducated nun in a convent of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Krakow, Poland during the 1930s. She came from a very poor family that struggled on their little farm during the years of World War I. She had only three years of very simple education, so hers were the humblest tasks in the convent, usually in the kitchen or garden. In the 1930s, Sr Faustina received from the Lord a message of mercy that she was told to spread throughout the world. She was asked to become the apostle and secretary of God's mercy, a model of how to be merciful to others, and an instrument for reemphasizing God's plan of mercy for the world. Her entire life, in imitation of Christ's, was to be a sacrifice - a life lived for others. At the Divine Lord's



request, she willingly offered her personal sufferings in union with Him to atone for the sins of others.

Jesus asked Sr Faustina to record these revelations or experiences, which she compiled in notebooks. These notebooks are known today as the Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska and the words contained within are God's loving message of Divine Mercy.

Though the Divine Mercy message is not new to the teachings of the Church, Sr Faustina's Diary sparked a great movement, and a strong and significant focus on the mercy of Christ. Pope John Paul II canonized Sr. Faustina in 2000 making her the "first saint of the new millennium." Today, the Divine Mercy message is a constant reminder to trust in Jesus' endless mercy, and to live life mercifully toward others. We also turn to her in prayer and request her intercession to our merciful Savior on our behalf.

St Faustina, You told us that your mission would continue after your death and that you would not forget us. Our Lord also granted you a great privilege, telling you to "distribute graces as you will, to who you will, and when you will." Relying on this, we ask your intercession for the graces we need, especially for the intentions just mentioned. Help us, above all, to trust in Jesus as you did and thus to glorify His mercy every moment of our lives. Amen.

The New Plenary Indulgence

During the course of Jesus' revelations to Sr Faustina on the Divine Mercy, He asked on numerous occasions that a feast day be dedicated to the Divine Mercy and that this feast be celebrated on the Sunday after Easter. The liturgical texts of that day, the 2nd Sunday of Easter, concern the institution of the Sacrament of Penance, the Tribunal of the Divine Mercy, and are thus already suited to the request of Our Lord. In a decree dated 23 May 2000, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments stated that "throughout the world, the second Sunday of Easter will receive the name Divine Mercy Sunday, a perennial invitation to the Christian world to face, with confidence in divine benevolence, the difficulties and trials that mankind will experience in the years to come."

Concerning the Feast of Mercy, Jesus said:

- ✠ *I want the image solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter, and I want it to be venerated publicly so that every soul may know about it.*
- ✠ *On one occasion, I heard these words: My daughter, tell the whole world about My Inconceivable Mercy. (Diary 420)*
- ✠ *I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day, I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day, all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy. (Diary 699)*
- ✠ *Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbours always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to absolve yourself from it. (Diary 742)*

Sr Helen Poovakot

The Divine Mercy Chaplet has been introduced this past year in our church and the novena is to be recited at 3 pm daily from Good Friday to the first Sunday after Easter. We will celebrate the feast of the Divine Mercy on the appropriate day - March 12.





Why do we celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday?

There are several reasons why we Catholics celebrate mass at least every Sunday or on Holy Days. Allow me to mention some of the most important ones.

It is Jesus who instituted the Eucharist and asked us to celebrate it. After the breaking of the bread and sharing the cup with his disciples, Jesus commanded them saying, "Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). Hence, to celebrate the Eucharist is our faithful observance of Christ's words and actions.

We should not deny ourselves of the essence of life - Jesus Christ himself. In John 6:1-71, Jesus repeatedly tells us that he is the Bread of Life from Heaven. And in the Eucharist, He gives us His Body and Blood as food and drink so that He, the essence of life, may continue to live within us.

It was the practice of the first Christians. They gathered everyday to break bread in their homes (Acts 2:46; Acts 20:7), therefore the churches of the early Christian communities were called "house churches". It was the center of their life as a community and the source of their strength to live according to the Spirit and spread the Good News.

It is the source and summit of our Christian life, according to the Vatican II document '*Lumen Gentium 11*'. Therefore, the Eucharist defines our Christian discipleship.

It is the Sacrament of God's Salvation. The redeeming act of God through the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord is made present in celebrating the Eucharist so that we can partake of it. Christ's salvific work is made present, not repeated. That is why it is said during the mass that it is Jesus Christ who is present and talking to us through the priest especially at the moment of consecration and during the proclamation of the Gospel.

It deepens our bond of communion. As we share in the Body and Blood of Jesus, we come closer to God and to each other.

Fr. Roed Desamparado

JM

Your Recipe Space

Steamed Fish - South East Asian style

Ingredients

1 medium sized grouper fish (*lapu-lapu / ハタ hata*), cleaned, descaled and salted ✪ 4 slices of lemon ✪ ¼ cup lemon juice ✪ ¼ cup sugar ✪ ¼ cup cilantro ✪ 3 tbsp ginger, cut into strips ✪ 2 tbsp lemon zest (either grated or thinly sliced) ✪ ½ cup water

Method

Place the fish on an aluminium foil (the foil must be large enough to cover the entire fish both sides). Stuff the fish with slices of lemon and 2 tbsp ginger strips then securely close the foil. Place the foil with fish in a steamer and steam for 20 to 30 minutes (this will depend on the size of the fish). While steaming, heat a saucepan and pour in the lemon juice. Add the sugar and stir until it fully dissolves in the lemon juice. Add water and bring to a boil.

Put in the lemon zest and the ginger strips, then simmer until sauce becomes somewhat thick. Remove the fish from the steamer and aluminium foil cover and place in a serving plate. Pour the sauce over the fish and garnish with cilantro.

Cecille Asaba

"Heart Beats" invites its readers to share their favourite recipes here. If you would like your recipe to be published in the next issue, please email the Editor.





Living in an international community can be a blessing in many ways, and here at Sacred Heart Cathedral, we have countless opportunities to get to know and familiarise ourselves with each other, our individual customs and cultures. Here's a glance at how two parishioners celebrate Holy Week in their respective countries.

Holy Week : Spain

For as long as I can remember, I have truly enjoyed Holy Week in Castelserás, my mother's native village, a village with 800 inhabitants, located in the East of Spain. During Holy Week, there are many religious observances such as processions, representations accompanied by church music which includes drums, bass drums and trumpets, especially in this area of Spain. In Castelserás and its neighbouring city called Alcañiz, Holy Week starts on Palm Sunday and lasts for seven days. However, the following Holy Week celebrations take place in several regions in Spain.

Palm Sunday begins with the blessing of the palms before the high mass followed by the procession, the "Paso" with Jesus seated on a donkey entering Jerusalem. The palms consist of olive branches and the palms for children - wonderful manufactured palm full of candy! On Holy Tuesday, the "Procesión del Encuentro" is enacted. Jesus meets His mother on the way to Calvary. The religious pray the fifteen Stations of the Cross, which is called "Viacrucis".

On Maundy Thursday, we have the Eucharistic celebration followed by veneration at the "Monumento", the place where the Romans guarded the body of Jesus. At 11 pm in Alcañiz, the procession of silence "La procesión del silencio" begins. The silence is only broken by the trumpets or the drums playing.

On Good Friday, at 11 am in Castelserás, the religious climb up Calvary "El Calvario", praying the Stations of the Cross. "La Rompida" (the Silence Breakdown) begins at 12 noon in Alcañiz, Calanda and other villages around. The village square is full of people with drums and bass drums. This is a special and emotional moment where all the musicians begin to play their drums at the same time, representing the moment God's own Son died on the cross. They play for about twenty minutes and in some villages, they play for three hours while participating in a procession. Some of their fingers even bleed, but they don't care. Their dedication is stronger than their pain. In the afternoon, another procession "La Procesión de la Soledad", takes place in Alcañiz. This is the oldest one in that area, originating in 1587.

On Holy Saturday, the Procession of the Holy Funeral, "El Santo entierro", takes place. Some years ago, it used to start at 7 am. Nowadays, it starts at 4 pm. Jesus along with many different Old Testament figures (Moses, David, the tribes of Israel etc) are all represented. People wear their traditional clothes and bring baskets full of "tortas" (the typical lunch eaten during this time).

On Easter Sunday, we have the solemn mass and procession called "Palometas" in Alcañiz. The "Santisimo", image of Jesus Christ is inside a case for safekeeping. In another sculpture, the Virgin Mary is inside a pomegranate, and when both are in front of each other, the pomegranate opens, Mary appears and some doves (from inside the pomegranate) fly off, symbolizing the freedom given by the resurrection.

A very important part of this festivity is the food. After the fasting and abstinence carried out during Lent, Easter is a great time to celebrate with family and friends and delicious food. I still remember my mom and grandmother preparing those dishes just for Easter. Lamb, sweet breads and specially the Easter cake are the main dishes during Holy Week. The Easter cake can be a simple sweet bread with a hard-boiled egg on top, or a very elaborate one stuffed with hard boiled eggs, longaniza (pork cold meat), rabbit, preserved pork ribs and back; covered with fresh parsley and extra virgin olive oil. My uncle Rafael always says it is the best meal in the world!

In Catalonia where I lived, the last day of Easter is Easter Monday. It is a common practice for godfathers and godmothers to give as a gift to their godchildren "La Mona". "La Mona" is a sweet cake with chocolate eggs on top; it can also be a favourite cartoon character in chocolate. Beautiful works of art are produced by the patisseries these days. After the festivities from Palm Sunday to Easter, Easter Monday is often a holiday - depending on the area.

On Easter Monday, it is very common to have a picnic outside the city with the entire family as the weather gets warm. So it's another year of missing Holy Week in my country but I keep the memories alive in my heart.

Ana Isabel de Blas





Lent & Easter : Democratic Republic of the Congo

I have celebrated the great feast of Easter in four different countries located on four continents: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Italy, Japan and the USA. As we all probably know, one thing common to virtually all countries is probably the fact that even Christians who do not attend mass on a regular basis try to go to church on Easter. And indeed, in my country, the DRC, the church becomes the centre of life for many during the period leading up to Easter. In most places I am familiar with, Stations of the Cross are so well attended that they must be held in the open air to accommodate all participants. Together, they can walk quite some distance, singing and remembering the suffering of the Lord, and the time it takes is the least of their concerns.

Churches are full during the Holy Week, and most importantly, full with young people and children, all singing, clapping and dancing with the choir. Easter Vigil can easily last two hours, and Easter mass much more. The joy of the singing, the dancing, and the captivating homily - which can easily last over 45 minutes - are such that time is of no relevance. Really, a country where there are no limits to the time it takes to pray and sing to the Lord.

Easter is one of the days most Christians in the Congo wear the best of their clothes, and there are many cases where people buy new ones for the occasion, as a sign of renewal. To find a place where people are "better" dressed outside Easter mass, you need to go to a gala dinner or perhaps a wedding, but even then, won't you only see worldly styles which are of no appeal in church?

Another common practice is the special family meals right after mass. In this impoverished country, it can be any form of good (and perhaps expensive) meat which the family does not eat on a regular basis. Fish can be a substitute, provided something delicious and unusual can be eaten. I would confess that lots of drinks are also consumed. It is a big feast, after all!

Easter is also that day when people demonstrate a lot of generosity. Food and drinks are shared with those less fortunate, clothes are offered to those who cannot afford to buy themselves. This generosity also greatly contributes to building peaceful communities. In fact, on Easter, I always have this feeling that all of us, rich or poor, eat well and share the joy of Christ resurrected.

Most importantly, joy is visible and palpable on all faces. Joy of the end of a period of privations. Joy of families and friends, rich and poor getting together on a special day. Joy of a new life beginning with the resurrection of the Lord. Joy of a future full of promise.

Charles Boliko

Vatican News



Pope Francis: Japan's "hidden Christians" a model for Church

Japan's "hidden Christians," or the early Christian communities who kept the faith alive through centuries of persecution, can be an inspiration to today's Catholics. That's what Pope Francis told Japanese bishops in an audience on March 20, in the Vatican, encouraging them to be fathers who are always available to their priests and brothers who share in their joys and difficulties.

Pope Francis received more than a dozen bishops from across Japan who are in Rome on their *ad limina* visit to the tomb of Peter. In his remarks to them, the Pope recalled St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit priest and his companions who brought Christianity to Japan in the mid 16th century and early Church leaders like Jesuit St Paul Miki and his followers whose "steadfast faith in the midst of persecution became an encouragement for the small Christian community to persevere in every trial."

The Pope recalled that this year, the Church celebrates the emergence of Japan's "hidden Christians" - the lay faithful who maintained the flame of faith alive even after "all lay missionaries and priests had been expelled from the country" and "amidst great danger and persecution."

The evangelical witness of Japan's first Christians, the Pope said, continues in the work of the many missionaries who contribute today to the Church and he called the bishops to support them in their ministry. But all baptized are called to be part of an "evangelizing community" - "even if that means opening our doors and stepping out into our own neighbourhoods." Pope Francis urged the bishops to encourage the lay faithful to participate fully in the life of the Church, looking to Japan's hidden Christians who were able to preserve the faith through personal prayer and sincere commitment to the welfare of the community at large.





Mount Mitake

It's hard to believe that the cherry blossom season is coming to an end already.... It's such a beautiful time of the year in Japan and always so nice to see the joy that the beautiful pale pink blossoms bring to everyone! Hope you all got to enjoy some fun "hanami" with friends and family. The blossoms on the Bluff and in Negishi Forest Park were as stunning as always!

With the excitement of the cherry blossoms winding down, but warmer weather around the corner and Golden Week on the way, I am sure many of you are now starting to turn your attention to places to go to enjoy the lush greenery and bright flowers that Spring will bring. Each season in Japan really does bring it's own joys and living in Yokohama, we are blessed to have many great day trip options.

As Spring rolls in, Mt Mitake in west Tokyo is a great option for a day trip with the whole family. Regarded as a sacred mountain, Mt Mitake (929m) falls under the Chichibu-Tama-Kai National Park and offers beautiful walking and hiking trails that can be enjoyed by all ages. Some of the highlights of a day trip there include the Musashi-Mitake shrine at the summit and from there, beautiful trails through the forest to waterfalls and a mossy rock garden. The shrine was said to be a popular place of worship for samurai at one point in time and the treasure hall in one of the neighbouring buildings has several pieces of samurai armour on display, including what is regarded as one of the top three suits of armour in Japan...!

If hiking all the way up to the shrine sounds like it may not be for you...Mt Mitake does actually offer an easy way out! A cable car can cut out the one hour walking time and whisk you most of the way up in just a few minutes. It would be a shame to go all the way there and not enjoy some hiking though, so a short 20-30 minute walk from the cable car terminus will take you to the shrine. On the way, you can pass through a small village with several inns, souvenir shops and soba restaurants. Personally I recommend the green tea soba for lunch! As Mt Mitake is considered sacred, it is said that pilgrims have been visiting the mountain and shrine for almost 2,000 years, hence the need for the inns.

After spending some time at the shrine - lots of great photo opportunities! - the rock garden is less than an hour's walk away. It's not a difficult hiking trail, but can be narrow in parts and it is best to wear hiking boots or sneakers. From the rock garden, the paths continue further on to neighbouring peaks - you can pick up a map at the information centre near the cable car, including information in English. The trails are not so difficult and for some fresh air and hiking close to Yokohama / Tokyo, there can be no complaints!

To access Mt Mitake from Yokohama :

Yokohama - Tokyo / Shinjuku (Tokaido Line or Shonan Shinjuku Line)
Tokyo / Shinjuku - Ome (Chuo Line - Express)
Ome - Mitake (Ome Line)
1,242 yen one way! Just over two hours' travel time.

From Mitake station, you can see the bus stop on the left across the road from the station exit. Two to three buses run every hour depending on the season, taking ten minutes to reach the cable car station and costing 270 yen one way (you can use your Pasma / Suica card!). The cables cars also run about 20 minutes and cost 1,090yen for a round trip.

Enjoy!

Caroline Kennedy

"Heart Beats" invites its readers to share their local adventure spots and holiday picks here. If you would like your article to be published in the next issue, please email the Editor.

