

# Caritas Internationalis General Assembly

22nd to 27th May 2011, Domus Mariae Palazzo Carpegna, Rome



Homily on 26 May, 2011 for the Mass during the GA of CI in Rome.

Bishop Isao Kikuchi, SVD: Caritas Asia

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

First and most, let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all of you, our friends in Caritas confederation, and through you, to all the good people who supported Japan during the time of recent disaster with prayers, messages and donations.

Tremendous number of e-mails we received in our office in Tokyo reminded us that we are not living in solitude but in solidarity.

It was a strongest earthquake in our recent history in Japan and massive Tsunami was far beyond the scale of what scientists had been predicting for. One of the worst hit cities, Miyako is a town where I was born and baptized 52 years ago. The city is prone to Tsunami and have rich experiences to protect themselves. In 1960 just after I was born, the area was hit by massive Tsunami caused by an earthquake in Chile but casualty was not so high thanks to the protecting walls surrounding cities. The local government and people were well prepared. Just a few days before the earthquake, I heard, one of the near-by affected cities even had an evacuation exercise. Therefore when the earthquake hit that city, residents just followed the prescribed procedures of evacuation and run to the government provided Tsunami shelter. The shelter supposed to withstand any tsunami wave. In that particular shelter, around 60 people lost their lives while Tsunami wave reached almost to the ceiling of 2nd floor. It was just unimaginable scale of wave. More than 20,000 people lost their lives and uncountable numbers of property lost. As for the crisis of the nuclear power plant, it may take many more years to clear the power plant area for human habitation. Government responded quite well and quick but with certain limitations and local NGOs including Caritas Japan are working hard to assist victims. Kindly continue to remember us in your prayer.

Now allow me talk about Asia. Pope John Paul II wrote in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, "ECCLESIA IN ASIA" that *"we cannot but be amazed at the sheer size of Asia's population and at the intricate mosaic of its many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions, which comprise such a substantial part of the history and patrimony of the human family. (6)"*

Such is Asia with its variety of different realities. At the same time the economic situation in Asia is quite diverse. On the one hand, one could enjoy ultra modern technologies in some parts of Asia, but on the other hand, one could easily encounter the world's poorest realities and human miseries in the same Asia. As we just experienced in Japan, in the past few years, Asia has been hit by several natural disasters of massive scale, such as powerful earthquakes in Indonesia, China and Japan, or the huge tsunami disaster in South Asia and Japan, and heavy damage caused by cyclones and heavy rain in Myanmar, Taiwan and

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Pakistan, to mention a few. Though natural disasters do not distinguish between poor or rich countries in their victims, it is obvious that rich countries such as Japan have distinctive advantages over poorer countries in the reconstruction of infrastructures and rehabilitation of people's daily lives. Disparity between the poor and the rich is wide and deep in Asia.

However, we also have to learn from the diverse realities of Asia that economic or material advancement by itself does not necessarily provide us with hope in our lives. In recent years more than thirty thousand people in Japan commit suicide every year. It all started in 1998 when several banks in Japan went bankrupt and the traditional "lifetime employment system" began to collapse. Since then and up until now, more than thirty thousand people have felt forced to commit suicide in this rich, modern and well-advanced country in one corner of Asia. Surrounded by an abundance of earthly riches and material goods, people in Japan have been encountering difficulty in finding hope for their future.

In contrast to this reality in Japan, I have met number of people in Asia who are in seriously challenging situation but full of hope for their future. For example, a father in Rajshahi in Bangladesh where more than 300 youths of the indigenous people have been receiving financial assistance from Catholic Church to continue their secondary education. I visited a family of one of these students who had been receiving financial assistance to continue his secondary education. The family house was surrounded by paddy fields but none of them belong to this family. They are landless. Their house has been built on public property. In order to make a living, the parents have been hired as day laborers, which provides them with less than 2 US dollars a day per person. Despite all sort of difficulties which they have been encountering, with his positive smile, the student's father was full of hope for their future. This man must have been suffering from discrimination throughout his life, and he must have endured absolute poverty. Yet he holds a hope that is quite high for his family's future because his determination and hope is based on his conviction that he is not living in solitude but in solidarity with people all over the world. Works of Caritas brought not only financial help for son's education but also this message of solidarity to this family, I believe.

In Gospel today Jesus said that "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love," and "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

We, the Caritas workers are the one to bring people to remain in love of Jesus so that people will be in perfect joy in Jesus Christ. We are the one to bring hope for the future. We are the one to let people know that they are not living in solitude but in solidarity. We are the one to let people know that they have control over their own destiny. We are the one to tell them that they are entitled to be fully capable to respond call from God, their own and unique vocation. And we all know what we have been doing in past, present and future as members of Caritas confederation is exactly this. We are bringing hope for all the people, sons and daughters of God in solidarity. Amen.