

Social Teachings of the Catholic Church ~ A Must Read!

50th Anniversary of PACEM INTERRIS

Bishop Marcellino Daiji TANI
Catholic Diocese of Saitama

Happy Easter!

Around the world people have welcomed the new Pope and in Saitama Diocese again this year we have welcomed two new deacons and a priest. Since there is much to celebrate, Easter will be especially joyous this year!

This year is the 50th Anniversary of the promulgation of Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *PACEM IN TERRIS* (1963). This encyclical of Catholic social teachings, which takes up the themes of peace and human dignity, is the first-ever to be addressed to "all men of good will". To commemorate this anniversary, the Episcopal Commission for Social Issues of the Bishops' Conference of Japan is working on a revised translation. It is hoped that the new text can be published some time before commemorating the annual, TEN DAYS FOR PEACE this year. It should be noted that, while Pope Leo XIII's *RERUM NOVARUM* (1892) was the first encyclical of social teachings, many other encyclicals on social teachings have been issued since.

How should we receive the social teachings of the Church?

Encyclicals about social teachings are issued so that the Gospel penetrates deeply into society and that society itself becomes more humane and more spiritually rich. In other words, societies can become more fruitful if they protect, liberate and set free the people who are their constituent members. Since the Church, based on her genuine teaching authority (magisterium), issues social teachings in the same way as moral teachings, pastoral ministers and laity alike have a duty to embrace and uphold these teachings. Moreover, in order to do this, we have to begin by reading these social teachings.

The era when *PACEM INTERRIS* was issued

The year 1962 was when the so-called "Cuban Missile Crisis" occurred. In the midst of this confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States (East-West Cold War), the Soviet Union started building nuclear-missile bases in Cuba. Seeing this as a threat, the US enforced a blockade and started inspecting ships. When a US reconnaissance aircraft was fired upon, it seemed as if the conditions then existed where World War 3 could easily start. However, luckily, the worst has somehow avoided.

On the other hand, this was also an era full of hope: colonized countries in Africa and in Asia were achieving independence one after another. However, the North-South problem,

the economic disparity between the developing countries and America-Europe was becoming a big issue.

The Pope, having read these “signs of the time”, spoke to the world about the issues of nuclear weapons, human rights, dialogue between nations, and peace through his social teachings.

How about our own time?

On the global level, the North-South problem, inequality and economic disparity between America-Europe and the countries in Asia and Africa, continues to widen. In addition, despite our heartfelt desire to abolish nuclear weapons, nuclear proliferation is still taking place. In addition, the only place where the East-West Cold War remains in effect is East Asia.

On the national level, although Japan’s society is steadily becoming multicultural, there still exists a discriminatory predisposition in society towards immigrants. Economic disparity is definitely widening within the country. Along with other issues, the American Bases in Okinawa and the No.1 Nuclear Power Plant accident in Fukushima clearly highlight the underlying structural discrimination between the urban and rural areas in Japan. Border issues between Japan and neighboring countries continue to cause much tension.

The issues that we are dealing with in Japan today are not any different from the issues that were being dealt with in *PACEM IN TERRIS*. Rather, one could say that the same issues have only escalated and worsened in our own day.

Social Justice is needed now

What society needs today is social justice. This justice is not the sort of “justice” that nations brandish about as their righteous cause for wars or disputes. Rather, a justice, which comes from seeking ways so that the Will of God is effective here on earth. The most essential virtues for society are respect for human dignity and human rights, equality, and peace between human persons and between various groups of people. Both globally and nationally, there has never been a time when the world needed social justice more than it does today.

Apart from *PACEM IN TERRIS*, there are also other encyclicals on social teachings as well as several commentaries which explain the essence of the texts; such as the “Outline of the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church (2009)”, published by the Bishops’ Conference of Japan. May we, as pastoral ministers and laity, learn about these teachings, share them together and give voice to them in society.

We should remember that a very important duty of Gospel evangelization is to help the Gospel and the social teachings of the Church penetrate ever more deeply into modern society.