

**Homily, Opening Mass, Asian Continental Assembly, 24 February
Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, SVD, Archbishop of Tokyo**

Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, SVD, of Tokyo and Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) presided over the Mass that opened the Asian Continental Assembly on Friday.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On behalf of Cardinal Charles Bo, the president of the FABC, I cordially welcome all of you to the Asian Continental Assembly of Synodality.

Despite all kinds of difficulties which have been surrounding us in Asia, we have been able to commence our walking together on the synodal path in all over Asia starting from each individual local community.

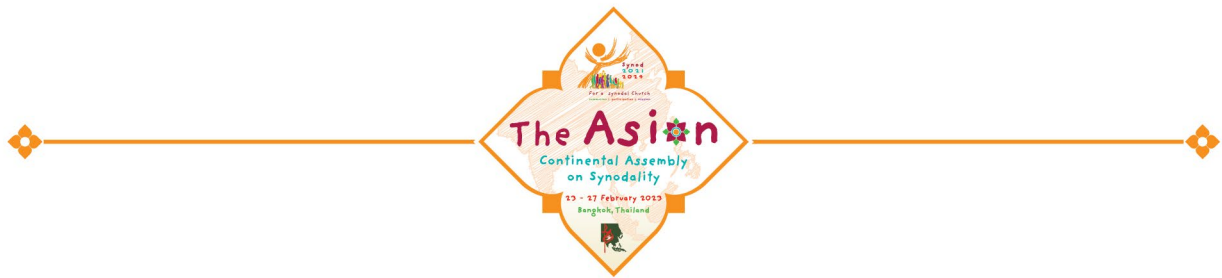
Though we always have difficulties to translate official documents into so many different languages of Asia, our biggest challenge was simply not to be able to gather people together because of the pandemic. However, as we understand through our journeying together on this synodal path that this Synod is not only one time passing event to celebrate but rather to realize change of attitude of entire people of God to make synodality the foundational nature of the Church, we know this journey will continue after the actual meetings. So as the pandemic situation is getting better and activities of the society has been resuming, we have strong foundation now to continue our journey together.

Yesterday, as I arrived early, I went through the Working Document for the continental Stage, not first time, but again, and found at almost end section on the point of homily. There are growing demand from people of God for us priests to deliver good and meaningful homily. So, this is not a homily but just a personal sharing of experience I want to talk this morning.

In 1995, I was in a city of Bukavu in Zaire to work for a refugee camp with Caritas Japan. It was a year later of the genocide happened in Rwanda and there were massive influx of refugees at that time. While I was there for three months, our camp was attacked with 2 hours of shooting and more than 30 refugees were killed.

But what I want to share now is my experience after that 3 months in the camp. In August of the same year, I went back to Bukavu to visit some of these camps for a week. I met one of the leaders of the refugees and asked him what he needed. Of course, I knew there are shortage of everything, no enough food, no enough clothings, no enough medicine and no education for their kids. So I was ready to offer some proposal of financial assistance from Japan.

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What the leader told me shocked me, he said, “Father, when you go back to Japan, tell people we are still here. We are forgotten.”

Despite the fact that everything is missing and they are in great needs for everything, he just said, “we are forgotten.” Indifference could kill people in need of assistance.

Then that cry of the leader of refugees reminded me of my previous experience in Ghana. I was a parish priest in a village in southern Ghana from 1987 to 1994. Economy was down at that time in Ghana and farmers were suffering because of severe drought. Having such difficulties of daily life, without enough income to sustain their families, people seemed happy in their lives. Especially when they came to the Church for Sunday Mass. Singing and Dancing with great smile. Beautiful people. So I asked one day how they could be so happy despite all these difficulties. Then they told me that they have Ghana Magic.

What Magic did they have? One of elder catechist taught me that the Magic is not a magic as such but the conviction that in difficulties no one is forgotten by others. Someone will come to help. Someone is always care about you. That is the Magic.

Indifference could kill people in need of assistance but solidarity would produce hope to live.

Exactly a year ago, the crisis in Ukraine started. We should remember people in Ukraine and all the people involved in this war and pray for Peace. Two years ago in this month, peace and stability in our neighbor in Asia, Myanmar, was taken away and still needs more prayer to re-establish peaceful country there. We should not forget indifference could produce despair but solidarity could produce hope to live.

Pandemic made us as if we are wandering in darkness without any light. Armed conflicts added more uncertainty and drag us into deeper darkness. We are all uncertain what would happen next. So naturally we try to find the way to protect ourselves from all these uncertainty and became selfish, forgetting others needs, indifferent to the cry of the vulnerable, cry of poor, cry of marginalized, cry of abused, cry of forgotten.

Indifference could kill so that we need solidarity to produce hope to live. Church as to be at the center of producing hope. Church should not be the source of despair or sadness. We have to be the source of hope because we have the gospel of life, gospel of hope and we are the one walking together in solidarity on the path of synodality.

As we begin our 3 days of journey together today, let us ask merciful Father to send us Holy Spirit so that we would be able to find the way of God to be people of God walking in solidarity on synodal path.

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