**Annual Japan/Korea Delegation Retreat: Sept. 6-9, 2021**

A retreat is a time to step away from the distractions of everyday life and get back in touch with your inner self and reconnect with God. Sometimes old poets say it best.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours…

English Romantic William Wordsworth wrote that 200 years ago, but he could have written it yesterday. In an age of iPhones and e-mails, iPods and Facebook, we find ourselves disconnected and adrift, in need of renewal and healing in a world that is “too much with us.”

With this thought, 14 Oblates of the Japanese Delegation gathered Sept. 6-9 in a ZOOM box, a cloud-based video communications app, for Annual Retreat 2021: Retreat Master – Most Rev. Charlie M. INZON, OMI, Bishop of Jolo, Philippines. Due to the Japanese Corona Pandemic restrictions, travel within the country proved to be difficult: consequently, it was decided to hold a “ZOOM annual retreat 2021”. Originally intending to come to Japan, Bishop Charlie M. Inzon was forced to conduct the retreat from the Philippines. The Oblates living in Japan participated from three different Islands, Kyushu, Honshu and Shikoku. The other Mission of the Japan/Korea Delegation located in Korea was unable to attend due to strict restrictions stating that all travelers arriving to Japan were required to be self-quarantined at their home or other location for 14 days. Travelers who arrive without proper documentation of a negative COVID-19 test would be denied entry to Japan. The Korean Mission decided to hold a separate retreat in Seoul.

The so-called “ZOOM annual retreat 2021” was centered in Kochi City where the schedule, for those who gathered, included fellowship, prayer, 5 conference talks and the daily celebration of Mass. Participants were asked to follow three government policies for preventing the corona virus: spacing during meals and gatherings, washing hands frequently and wearing masks.

The theme, “Mission and Community in a Wounded World”, invited us to look at the realities around us with new eyes, new perspectives, and in a more profound way and to focus more intently on God’s presence in our lives. The Bishop said we will start our retreat from where we are. “Our way to God is where we are: our way of being.” He said it is important that we are anchored in our present condition specifically as victims or survivors of covid pandemic. We may have not been infected but we are affected or limited by pandemic. The Bishop led us in different reflections on how to develop a deeper contemplative spirit to understand “where we are now” and “where we should be” through five talks.

**TALK 1:** “See, how much he loves him…”
-The Mystery of Two Crowns: Corona Virus and the Crown of Thorns
– Scripture Reflection: Jesus and Lazarus
– Longing for God in the Woes of Pandemic: A Longing for Love
– Jesus for Lazarus: An Experience of Sacrificial Love
– Good News: God is Present in Our Passion
– Dark News: Death Continues to Loom
– Glorious News: Dawn of Resurrection
– Outside Us: Wounded and Bleeding World

**TALK 2:** Prophetic Mysticism – To walk with Jesus is a continuous process of going up and down and up…

**TALK 3:** Prophetic Mysticism – Going Down the Mountain…And to the Other Side

**TALK 4:** “Do whatever He tells you.”
– Scriptural Text The Wedding at Cana
– Puzzling Events in the Context of Mission
– Puzzling Events in Japan

**TALK 5:** “Wasn’t it like a fire burning in us when He talked to us?”
– Contemporary Challenges for the Church
– Reflections for Oblate Response
– On the Road Back to Jerusalem
– Concluding Invitation to Japan-Korea Delegation

Today, more than ever, the world is looking at us religious critically. People are becoming more aware and questioning the value of what we are doing which governments, non-government organizations, and social workers are already doing as well. What was prophetic action to missionaries before like human and community development initiatives is no longer seen as prophetic because those are being done, and most of the times in better and efficient way, by other entities and institutions.

Now instead, people are no longer critical of what we DO, but of ***WHO WE ARE***. Losing therefore the mystic in us and losing sight of our mystical experiences will be tragic to the life of the Church, of our congregation, of the mission of proclaiming the Good News. The media has been very good and effective in spreading “bad news”. It is time to reassess how we are proclaiming the Good News, the Joy of the Gospel, which as Pope Francis invites us to highlight in our witnessing and preaching. “Wasn’t it like a fire burning in us…” Nourishing the mystic in us and reassessing our prophetic action is therefore an imperative to us Oblate missionaries, and one day be able to say to one another and the people we serve be able to exclaim in their encounters with us: “Wasn’t it like a fire burning in us when He talked to us?”, and then recognize, “It is the Lord!”

The retreat concluded with the celebration of Mass. Then the final talk by the Bishop. We thanked the Bishop and parted with the hope that we will all meet for Christmas later this year without ZOOM.