

Holy Year 2025
New Year Message

*Growing and Maturing
in our Faith*

Catholic Diocese of Sendai
Bishop Edgar Gacutan, C.I.C.M.

January 1, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wish you a Happy New Year. May God pour out His abundant grace upon you, may you live each day in peace, and may God hear your prayers.

In his letter for the Holy Year 2025, Pope Francis wrote:

Pilgrimage is of course a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. Setting out on a journey is traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life. A pilgrimage on foot is a great aid for rediscovering the value of silence, effort and simplicity of life.

I have designated seven pilgrimage destinations in our diocese. These are Hirosaki Church, Yotsuya Church, Yonekawa Church, Mototerakoji Church, Nodamachi Church, Okago Martyrdom Site and Hirose River Martyrdom Monument.

The Okago Martyrdom Site and the Hirose River Martyrdom Monument commemorate about 1,000 Christians who died for their faith in Tohoku during the Edo Period (1603-1867). Remembering our faith elders is part of our journey as Christians. Historian Edward Hallett Carr said: "History is a continuing dialogue between the present and the past." Indeed, prayer is for us a dialogue with God, the origin of history. Prayer moves us forward.

When we celebrate Mass, we recall the event to which we owe our existence as redeemed people: the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. After the consecration we say: "We proclaim your death, O Lord, and confess your resurrection, until you come." At the end of the Mass, we are sent to go and announce the Good News of the Lord. It is the same news we heard during the mass. We are a people who go forward.

In my 2024 New Year' Message, I compared our parishes to a field, and invited you to talk about how we take care of each other in our parish communities. Having heard your answers and desires, from your representatives and pastors, I ask that during this year we exert effort in understanding more deeply our liturgy or how we worship.

There is a basic teaching that our Church has always followed. The teaching says that "the law of prayer is the law of faith and the law of life." The teaching means that our prayers express our beliefs and at the same time our prayers form our beliefs. In other words, how we worship guides us in how we live our Christian faith and fulfill our Christian mission in the world by manifesting the continuing presence of the Risen Jesus Christ.

Let us know the meaning of our liturgy and prepare well our worship and prayers. Priests and pastoral workers who speak your language will meet with you more frequently so you can talk about the contents of our Catholic prayers and forms of our worship.

In the 12th Chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, we read the following words:

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us
and persevere in running the race that lies before us
²while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.

When I read those words, I imagine an athletic stadium filled with cheering fans. Those who are on the upper seats seem to be standing in the clouds. The “clouds of witnesses” are generations of believers, including the the Edo Martyrs, who cheer for us as we persevere through all challenges as we grow and mature in our faith.

We are free to practice our religion in Japan, but I know what trials some of you face in this country. Walk on with faith in your heart, as one song puts it.

“Hope does not disappoint.” That’s the theme of the Holy Year. It comes from the Letter of Paul to the Romans 5:5:

and hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts
through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.

I hope to walk, pray and converse with you as I do my to pilgrimage to the designated pilgrimage destinations of our diocese during the Holy Year.

Your fellow pilgrim,

Bishop Edgar Gacutan



My third New Year's Message as Bishop of Sendai