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## Mons. Joseph Maria Abella new bishop of Fukuoka: “Henceforth we shall walk together”

Tokyo – While Japan breathed a sigh of relief at the announcement of the upcoming lifting of the state of emergency in 39 of its 47 Prefectures, the sixth Sunday of Easter offered further source of joy to the Catholic community of the diocese of Fukuoka, in whose homonymous capital, at 2:00 p.m. on 17 May, in the cathedral of Daimyomachi dedicated to Our Lady of Victory, was held the ceremony for the installation of the new bishop, Monsignor **Joseph Maria Abella**, celebrated with a Eucharistic liturgy with a limited number of attendees owing to the new coronavirus. *Pope Francis had announced his appointment on 14 April, but owing to restrictions imposed by the danger of Covid 19, it was only after more than a month that the bishop could finally reach the Episcopal See.* The diocese of Fukuoka includes, in addition to the prefecture of Fukuoka, the prefectures of Saga and Kumamoto on the island of Kyushu, in the southwest of the Japanese archipelago, with about 30,000 Catholics out of a population of 7,753,229 inhabitants distributed in 55 parishes, over an area of 14,873 km<sup>2</sup>. The diocese has been vacant since April 27, 2019, after the resignation of Bishop Ryoji Miyahara, temporarily led by the Apostolic Administrator Hironobu Sugihara. “When virtually all church activities had been suspended in an effort to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus,” said Monsignor Abella in a message sent to the faithful in April, “I received a phone call that surprised me. The Apostolic Nuncio to Japan, Monsignor Joseph Chennoth, had called to inform me that the Holy Father had decided to send me to Fukuoka as bishop of that diocese. You can imagine my astonishment - he added, describing his first reaction to the announcement - *However, since the appointment came from the Holy Father and I was certain that it was the result of a thorough process of discernment, my answer was: Yes, I accept!*”



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[Rev. Fr. Josep Maria Abella Batlle, C.M.F. was born on November 3, 1949 in Lleida, Spain. After completing his studies in Philosophy and Theology at the Faculty of Jesuit Theology in Sant Cugat del Vallès \(Barcelona\), he made his perpetual profession on December 8, 1972. He was ordained a priest on July 12, 1975. After his priestly ordination he carried out his pastoral ministry in the Japanese dioceses of Nagoya and Osaka. He held a number of positions that include, inter alia, Provincial of the Claretian Fathers, director of the Claretian Committee for Evangelization and Superior General of the Missionaries Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for two terms \(from 2003 to 2015\) for which he moved to Rome. After returning to his land of mission he resided in Imaichi parish, in the archdiocese of Osaka. Since 2017 he has been Parish Priest of the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Osaka. On June 2, 2018, came the appointment by Pope Francis and on July 18, the consecration as auxiliary bishop of Osaka. “Why am I being sent to the diocese of Fukuoka? - Monsignor Abella wondered and asked the faithful of Fukuoka in his message - This is the question that I asked myself and that probably you are asking too. I finally decided to accept this appointment as a call from the Lord”. To fulfil the task entrusted to him, the bishop addressed an appeal to the faithful, priests and religious of the Catholic community of which he became Pastor: “However,](#)

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henceforth we shall walk together. I would like to stress the word 'together'.

Please, let me walk together with you, keeping alive the journey of the Diocese of Fukuoka with an attentive gaze to the present reality. I have a lot to learn, so I ask you to accompany me on this journey." He went on to explain how he wishes to carry out his mandate and his hopes: "By walking together I am certain that we will rejoice in our being together, that we will be able to discern the themes that deserve special priority and how to accomplish the mission that has been entrusted to us. This I hope from the bottom of my heart. *Responding to the grace of the Holy Father's visit last November, let us try to bring the light of the Gospel to present-day Japanese society.*" In the homily of the inaugural Mass held on 17 May, the text of which has not yet been published in full, Monsignor Abella returned on these themes and confirmed his desire to live his ministry with passion "towards Christ and towards others", and recalling the words of the verse of St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: "The love of Christ impels us" (2Cor. 5:14), he referred to them as a source of Christian living and a driving force for evangelization, *urging the entire Catholic community of the diocese to "strive for a Church full of joy that will attract those who are distant."*



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