

September 1, 2020

Dear Partners in Christ:

It is always a joy to be able to share with you what is happening in Japan every couple of months. Of course, the whole world has been participating in this year's Coronavirus pandemic. No country has been exempted from the influence and effects of this devastating virus. We know how much the US has been impacted by this pandemic. In contrast, Japan has been fortunate to have had relatively few cases compared to other countries up to this point in time. Even with over 30 million people crammed into Tokyo, there is only an average of between 100-300 new cases each day. Through the end of August, the tally brought Tokyo's cumulative total to about 21,000 people.



Tokyo has kept its alert for the coronavirus pandemic at the highest of four levels, which means “infections are spreading.” In an effort to stem the spread, Gov. Yuriko Koike declared last month that Tokyo will extend until Sept. 15 a request for establishments serving alcohol to shorten their business hours, since many cases have spread from there. Around 50% of the new cases are people in their 20s and 30s, who often visit such establishments.

There are a number of thoughts about why Japan has continued to see relatively few cases of infected people. Some of them revolve around the national characteristics and culture of Japan. As a group of people, Japanese tend to be reserved and self-restrained. I have heard that in America even asking people to wear a mask has become politicalized and there is much resistance to being told what to do. The Japanese person, in general, shrugs and thinks, “It can't be helped,” and then quietly complies.

Some will argue that this conformity without much resistance is the result of Japan being a society based on rice farming where cooperation has been essential for a village to survive over the centuries. The Japanese also have been taught from a very young age to be patient or to endure. This may be due to the great number of disasters that occur here: earthquakes, tsunami, typhoons, landslides, flooding and volcanoes. Submission to — even reverence of — uncontrollable forces, be they natural or human made, has been a refrain you hear throughout Japanese history.

Another line of thinking is that the Japanese are quite healthy with good access to affordable and quality healthcare, as well as built-in social distancing that comes by bowing instead of handshakes or hugs, a strict attitude towards cleanliness and handwashing (e.g., removing shoes at the entrance of one's home), all of which may have contributed to Japan being able to keep the number of infections low. Early on in the pandemic, one of our long-time Japanese friends sent us several masks she had made. When we called to thank her, she mentioned that since elementary school age, the Japanese are taught that when they have a cold, they would automatically wear a mask to school, so as not to spread the cold to others. So evidently this has been instilled as a common courtesy for generations. Now, with Covid-19, it is only all the more natural to be vigilant out of consideration for others.



The spread of the coronavirus drastically changed summer traditions in Japan, with new forms of seasonal events emerging thanks to digital technologies. Fireworks events and summer festivals have been increasingly going digital. There is also a service that enables users to make a virtual visit to their

ancestors' graves, instead of the usual annual return to their hometowns to see relatives and make a pilgrimage to the gravesite.

As you know, this pandemic has prompted authorities worldwide to introduce entry restrictions on border traffic. Regulations in Japan have sparked a particularly strong reaction from the international community, as it was the only Group of Seven member denying entry to long-term and permanent residents. Only very recently have some of those restrictions loosened up slightly.

Speaking of natural disasters, a very powerful typhoon is currently approaching southwestern Japan and has intensified into a dangerous storm, with officials warning of record rainfall, huge waves and high tides. Another typhoon just passed through virtually the identical path just 2 days ago. The weather agency is warning that people in affected areas should not hesitate to evacuate their homes and find shelter, even though they may be worried about becoming infected with the new coronavirus. The typhoon is projected to have an atmospheric pressure of 915 hectopascals, strength that would put it on par with a Category 5 hurricane in the States.



As we remember you back in the States through our prayers, please pray :

- 1) that we may continue to be able to bring God's grace to the people of Japan who do not know Christ.
- 2) for protection for people who will soon be in the path of the coming destructive typhoon, and others that will also be coming this year.
- 3) for our college and seminary, as later this month we will attempt to start some of the classes at the campus, while others will continue online during this pandemic.



May God richly bless you all during these days of stress and anxiety.

In Christ,

Jim and Carol Sack, Tokyo