



Morning Sermon

by Rev. Shohei Tsuda

Episode 3

When you received divine blessings, you won't receive more unless you come to worship.

January 3, 2021

Good morning. We have been able to welcome January 3rd (Reiwa 3), the last day of Sanganichi or first three days of the New Year (January 1st to 3rd).

I have been talking about the topic of practicing faith yesterday, and quite often over the past few days. Our Founder expressed the worship hall as a place for people to pray and give thanks to Kami-Sama, and a place to practice faith. Yes, it's true, because we worship Kami-Sama here.

A place to practice faith is like a school or a prep school. There is a Sensei who teaches us how to practice faith at the Okekai. And you can express your own silent prayers and communicate with Kami-Sama. You can also give thanks. You can also reflect upon yourself. This place is also like a self-study room. In a way, this place is like a classroom, where there are teachers and students, listening to speech—it's a school.

When I used the word “practice,” I think there are two kinds of places for practice. The first one is inside the worship hall. You get to practice inside the worship hall. Then what is the other place we practice faith? It could be at home, while walking, eating, taking a bath, going to school, working, or going to the minister's residence to practice tengaku¹ (music).

¹ The origin of Tengaku goes back to Gagaku(雅楽), a form of Japanese traditional music. Konkogyo has its own musical culture called “chuseigaku (中正楽)” which developed uniquely to respond immediately to the ceremonial rituals of the celebration. It is performed as an offering to Kami-Sama.

It's basically any place and any time you step out of this Hiromae. "Ohiromae² (worship hall)" means "in front of Kami-Sama." Unlike when you are being trained here at the Ohiromae, it's the places where you can study or practice outside of school, a home, or at another place.

Since I had been waiting for another chance to enter into a university after graduating from high school, I was imagining a prep school. Going to the prep school, we listened to the lectures in the classroom. For self-study, the students had to use the study room. They cannot remain in the classroom where the lectures took place.

After studying, I went home or sometimes I went to the park. Even when I used the train to and from the prep school, I checked my vocabulary notebook. I used whatever time I could find to study. And even when I got home. I reviewed and got a better understanding of the lectures. I also tried to solve problems to make sure that I had a deeper understanding of the problems and tried to figure out the problems that I didn't understand well. When I couldn't solve them, I went to the prep school again, I got ahold of the teachers and asked them for help.

I suppose this is what it means to practice. After that, I would study again at home using my notebooks and textbooks. This is self-studying at home.

Just like this, anywhere your body goes you can

² Worship hall is called "Ohiromae" (御広前) in Japanese, where "O" means politeness, "hiro" means width of space, and "mae" represents in front of Kami.

make it your place to study the faith. You don't need any pens, or a piano or anything like that. As long as your heart is directed toward Kami-Sama, it will become faith practice. So, you can practice faith anywhere, anytime. Therefore, whenever or wherever you are, you can make it your place to practice faith.

There is a teaching that goes, "Doing your day job is spiritual training." Kagyo in Japanese, for a person in business, means a family business. In the old days of Japan, people usually owned family businesses. But in today's times, it's the same for everyone; people who work at a company, people who raise children, people who are caregivers, students at school, and young children in kindergarten.

I mean, whether it's in the workplace, there is a role that we all have, so let's practice faith on the spot. If you are a working person, you are working most of the time you are awake, so if you can't practice there, there is no chance to practice faith.

Think about it, you can practice faith all the time from the moment you wake up. Although it would be best if we could practice faith while we sleep, we can practice faith by turning our consciousness to Kami-Sama from the time we awake up to the time we go to sleep. It is more correct to say that we should do things while practicing our faith. We can do that.

The Founder also expressed that this worship hall is a place where people can practice their faith and bring in their final draft for review.

When it comes to the word “practice,” I’ve heard about the Maiko in Gion (Japanese professional entertainers in Kyoto), who had the opportunity to go to the Konko church. I remember well how often she used the word “practice” when she expressed worshipping. Usually, she received practice from her mentor. Again, this worship hall is the place to receive faith practice. Which means you should practice what you’ve learned. Practice applying what you’ve learned outside the worship hall.

And as your practice progresses, that is, as your practice of faith continues, your vessel for receiving blessings will develop. With this vessel, you can express your sincere gratitude or pray for something and you will be able to receive divine blessings.

That is what it means to have faith and receive blessings, according to the Founder. And this is also teaching relayed to Ichimura Mitsugoro.

Generally speaking, at first, people go to worship because they want blessings. This may not apply to everyone, but it often becomes one of the first things that draw people to the church in the beginning.

After you receive divine blessings, if you don’t go to worship, you will not be able to receive blessings. In many cases, people don’t continue going to church. When people get what they want, they don’t care to worship anymore. Even if you haven’t gone to church for a while, you may still receive blessings to some extent from the reserves of faith you had, but if you completely stop going, you won’t be able to receive any

blessings.

There is more to this teaching. I would like to share the first half of this teaching “When you receive,” here it goes.

Tenchi-Jitsugetsu-Ikigami-KonkoSama said, “Though I often tell you not to come to worship, you won’t receive divine blessings if you don’t come.”

And then,

“I tell you not to come because if you come and don’t receive divine blessings, it will only make your legs tired and deplete your precious money. You will be troubled,” he explained.

Next,

“Once you receive divine blessings, you won’t receive more unless you come to worship” (Gorikai I Ichimura Mitsugoro 2-31 Excerpt).

This teaching pretty much implies to some people not to come if they feel it is a burden to do so.

The Founder Konko-Sama also teaches “Do not force yourself to come.” It really depended on the person, though. Basically, he taught them that they should come to worship often and receive divine blessings.

When the Founder mentioned not to come, he meant to say that even if you come here, you can’t receive blessing, because it will only trouble you. Your

legs will get all tired and your precious money will feel like it's depleting. In reality, you are supposed to be able to receive divine blessings if you do come to worship. So, what do you think it means to not be able to receive blessings even if you do come to worship? The point here is that your practice of faith is just not progressing.

Let's think about this a little more. What does it mean to progress in the practice of faith? We are supposed to be coming here to learn how to make the vessels within our hearts to receive blessings, but we simply aren't doing that. We just go to the Ohiromae to pray or have the sensei pray for us. "Mr. Konko, I ask you to pray for me." "Since you are a person who can do it, and you are close to Kami-Sama, pray for me and make my wish come true. Pray for me hard. I don't want to do any kind of faith practice." And they just leave everything up to Kami-Sama and Konko-Sama.

There is no way you can reform yourself and make yourself a good vessel to catch the blessings. Talking about ignoring your troubled situation and looking at why you cannot receive divine blessings—Your way of life is basically out of alignment with the principles of Heaven and Earth. We need to realign it or fix it. Whether it's the person's fault or because of your ancestor's meguri ³(accumulated offenses), I'll leave it at that for now. In any case, no matter how hard you try to live,

³ If a person who is alive between heaven and earth does something that is not in accordance with the laws of heaven and earth, it will accumulate as a circulation, and it will be like a debt to heaven and earth. This became a difficulty for the family and misfortune followed.

your heart is basically a bit off from the line to receive divine blessings. We need to realign our heart back to its correct position. We need to fix it.

People may say, “I have no intention of changing myself, but I’ve come to pay my respects, so give me my blessings.” “I’ll give you my offering. Here’s the money. Just pray for me. I won’t change my way of my life.” This kind of mentality is unacceptable. And it will get you nowhere.

Without the intention of mending your ways, and reforming yourself, no matter how often you come to church, it’ll just be a waste of time. It’s nothing more than a selfish faith attitude.

If you never listen to what the teacher has taught, and you just do things your own way, you can’t expect to improve. It’s the same for piano lessons, ballet lessons, calligraphy lessons, etc.

Practicing faith is the same thing as an apprenticeship. The statement “If you come and don’t receive divine blessings” means if you continue to have a selfish attitude when you come to church, going to worship will make you tired and waste your money. And if that’s the case, you need not come. In other words, if you don’t want to study, why don’t you quit school? That’s what I mean. This message is quite frank, isn’t it?

If you think about it like going to a cram school, at first you ask them “I would like you to teach me.” Next, you pay the monthly tuition. When you need to take the train to go there, you need to pay the train fare. And you need money to buy a bento or bread or something.

Yesterday, there was person who mediated about

elementary school kids going through all that trouble, catching the train, and going to Nishinomiya for prep school or cram school. Of course, it is great if it makes them feel that studying is fun and beneficial. And if it brings them learning and growth, that's also good—even if it may not be fun.

But what if the student goes there but doesn't feel like listening to the teacher? The teacher works hard to teach students how to solve the problems. Nevertheless, the student is not willing to listen and learn. Or in this case, he won't be able to make a vessel of knowledge. There will be no growth in academic ability.

Then the teacher may say, "The fact that this is happening, quite frankly is not motivating to you, is it?" "You're not listening, you're sleeping, you're playing, right? Then, you're getting tired, your legs hurt and it's a waste of money. So why don't you just quit?"

That's what Konko-Sama meant when he said, "Don't come." "If you are just practicing a selfish kind of faith, it will only make your legs tired and deplete your precious money. Things are going to get even more difficult for you if you continue." "I'm telling you to stop coming here because it's useless." This is what Konko-Sama said.

However, if you simply reply like an idiot and say, "Fine then, I'll just stop coming to church," you will not be able to receive divine blessings. Viewing this from the opposite side, you are making Konko-Sama say such things. I'm not sure Konko-Sama said this to him (Ichimura Mitsugoro), though. The truth is Konko-

Sama really wanted this person to receive divine blessings. He genuinely wanted that ujiko to practice faith with a truly sincere heart. The Founder doesn't want our faith to become selfish—the kind of faith where people just say, “I've made an offering, so it's all good.” “I've prayed. I'm done.” “I'm asking you to pray for me and help me.” It's not like that.

This is a faith where you listen to Kami-Sama's teaching and understand it well. Then practice what you've learned. Konko-Sama didn't want people to make him say such things. But if you really have no intention to learn, then you really shouldn't be coming. But you want to receive blessings, don't you? If so, no matter how hard Kami-Sama tries to help, no matter how much I try to help, if you don't feel like putting in any effort, there is no room for growth. If your heart is damp, it will not light. That's why you need to change your mindset and learn and receive lessons. That's how you should feel.

Yesterday, I also told you about this teaching “Listen to prayers and learn, you will have divine blessings.” It means to put aside, to stop the act of praying and change your mindset to listening and learning instead. Then you can receive divine blessings. That kind of mindset will bring you divine blessings.

And when you do receive your blessings, from that point on, you should go to church diligently or you will not be able to receive more blessings. People may say, “I got my blessings, I got my blessings, I'm relieved. It's all good.” When you stop learning, your skill will never

improve. Isn't that what lessons are for? It doesn't matter if it's a lesson, a club activity, a brass band, or anything else, as long as you continuously attend in person, you will improve.

No matter how hard you work at it in your six years of integrated junior and senior high school, plus four years of university, let's say it's a total of ten years of practicing a skill. 10 years of practice would be considered quite commendable. But, if your chances to learn and practice were to decrease, you may say things like "I like what I do, so I'll just practice at home." I don't think it's a lie, but it must be difficult. There are fewer opportunities to gain something, even if you decide to practice alone every day, the reality is that it doesn't work out the way you think it will. The only reason you can continue is because you have a place to practice, and without that, you wouldn't be able to continue, even if you wanted to.

And after that, if you want to know what happens, the practice at home becomes less and less intensive and the time you dedicate for practicing also decreases. Then when that happens, our fingers that used to move, no longer move as they used to. Our lung capacity decreases. Our interpretation of the music shifts. You forget what you've learned, and you are finding it difficult to play new songs, right?

What you used to be able to do, you no longer are able to. You can no longer play the songs you used to be able to play. You may feel that you can play the song somehow, but your skill level gets rusty. Anyway, continuing to attend classes can be good if we enjoy it, but

it can also be tiring at times. Even so, there is power in continuing, and the more you keep going to practice, the more you will grow.

It's the same with faith practice; it's a learning process. You may say, "Oh, I received my blessings, so it's all good." If you think that this is the end and stop praying, your growth will stop in an instant. It's easy to receive the blessings if they make an instant vessel to receive them at that time. There are even some people who can make a vessel overnight. There are people who can make it quick and easy at once, but those people will drop it immediately.

As you keep up the practice and let it root within you for a year, three years, five years, or ten years, your blessings won't easily fall through. However, it's necessary to keep coming to church and continue to practice the faith. It's not an easy task for humans. Even if we have the desire to keep coming, it's hard to do.

In that sense, we are very grateful to have a place like the worship hall to practice. At times, isn't it cumbersome to come here sometimes? I know it's hard to confess.

There may be cold days in winter, or you might wake up feeling like lead, and you feel tired visiting the church. Even in such conditions, make the time to visit the church. Whether you are near here or far from here, take the time to visit.

There are people who say such things as "I have been receiving divine blessings a lot. I've been visiting the church for one, two, or three years already. I don't have any problems now. And I want to go on a trip. So,

I don't have extra money. So, I'm going to excuse myself. Oh, and I also heard there is a typhoon coming, so I was thinking of going to church but I can't. So I'll come next month instead," something like that. If you start making sly excuses, you will start to make even greater excuses.

Now, those who are here, listening to me right now. I'm sure you are all familiar with this app called LINE, where a lot of people now are beginning to listen to my morning sermon. It's gaining more and more listeners (We have almost a hundred listeners now.) I really want to tell those who are listening through LINE; you may think that this way of listening in to my sermons is very convenient, especially if you are far away from Amagasaki. But I want you to know that it's a big mistake to think so. I'm telling you right now. You're laughing aren't you? Hahaha!

In Kyushu, or anywhere else, when I first started sharing the recordings, it was intended for the people who got sick or people who got injured and have not been able to come here. One individual asked permission from me, saying, "Sensei, I would like to forward this sermon to someone I know who may benefit from this. May I share it with him?" So I said, "Yes, you can. It's OK." One can truly benefit from them by listening carefully, understanding the message, and practicing it—resulting in divine blessings.

If a person receives divine blessings, it's important to come to church or there will be no divine blessings.

The fact that you can listen to sermons quickly and receive blessing is actually a test from Kami-Sama. It's like a free trial sample that gets distributed. That's why they could receive blessings. If you think this is going to work well all the time, you're wrong. If you have been blessed, you have to come to worship. From that point, you need to diligently begin to practice faith. The act of visiting the church is really an essential part of faith.

If you think about it, visiting the church, takes time and a lot of work. And depending on people, it could get costly for some people who live far away from here. It's not easy. Everything you do will be an offering of your sincere heart to Kami-Sama. It's your single heartedness. You may say, "Kami-Sama, thank you so much for helping me, or Kami-Sama please help me. If you ask how, you go about expressing your sincerity through gratitude, apologies and supplications, you have to use your feet.

The founder of the Tamamizu Church taught, "Although it is said that the blessings come from your own heart, it begins with your feet. In other words, it means to go to church." Even the Founder mentioned that if you do not go to worship, you cannot receive divine blessings.

I forgot if it was the Founder, the 2nd generation or 3rd generation Konko Sama who said this, but one of them mentioned that a faith of worship is a faith of blessings. It's really important to go to church by actually using your feet to go there physically.

It is more efficient to go to cram school and study

in the study room than to study at home. It's hard to study at home. Even if it's a Saturday or Sunday, or even if there are no classes—if the study hall is open, it would be better to go there to study in person. It is the environment that matters. This is what's important.

Your effort to come will reach Kami-Sama. Kami-Sama will be happy and say, "Your sincerity has been accepted."

However, if you feel "It costs a lot of money and time. It's cumbersome to come. I'm all right to listening to this right here," there would be no way to receive divine blessing due to your lack of devoutness.

.....

...Isn't this silence scary? Those of you who may be listening might be in shock and be like "Ah!" But this is important. So, I'm telling you.

I will read the teaching one last time.

"Though I often tell you not to come to worship, you won't receive divine blessings if you don't come."

"I tell you not to come because if you come and don't receive divine blessings, it will only make your legs tired and deplete your precious money. You will be troubled." That is why Konko Daijin said this.

"When you receive divine blessings, you won't receive more unless you come to worship,"

according to teaching by Ichimura Mitsugoro.

It is great for those who are able to come here like

this, today. For those who live far from here, of course, you can't come here every day, though, it depends on how far you live from here and other circumstances. I don't tell you that you should come every day while you live in Amagasaki city. As for distance, each situation is different. Whether it's far or near, or in regards to the frequency, it is a matter of a person's relationship with Kami-Sama, not mine. I really have no say in this.

But in general, if you live far from here, it would be the best to have the heart to come once a month using your feet. To come here in person, by foot is really important.

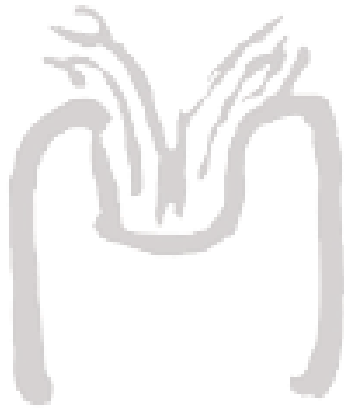
It's a convenient world we live in. In the Founder's era, the Edo period, people had to walk, or at best, use the boat. As times are changing, the train has made it easier to visit the church.

That's the convenient part, and that's a good thing. However, when human laziness comes into play, and we become lax, that is when meguri (offenses) are accumulated.

While distributing videos of the ceremony on YouTube, can cause you to think in ways that it's not intended to. It can be dangerous.

I try to be careful when I speak every morning, knowing that my messages can be misinterpreted. That's why I often give pep talks. I don't just distribute this to people who I think will never again come to worship after hearing this. I try to make sure that these kind of people don't listen to this.

I truly hope you think it's important to go to worship. It is great that you have come today.



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January 3, 2021

Published by
Konkoko Amagasaki Church
September 20, 2022

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Amagasaki-shi, Hyogo-ken 660-0892
Japan