

KONKO Church of Chicago
Monthly Service July 07, 2024

Good morning! Happy Sunday in this *new* week of Kami's blessings! And thank you very much for joining today's service. This is our monthly service for July 2024. I hope each one of you is in good health & excellent spirits on this beautiful summer morning.

It is July 7th today. Tanabata, also referred to as Star Festival, is celebrated in Japan every year on this day. It's a romantic occasion originated from an ancient Chinese tale. Looking up the starry sky, we think of the two '*star-crossed lovers*,' Orihime (Vega) and Hikoboshi (Altair) and Tanabata Legend.

Orihime was a beautiful talented weaver and Hikoboshi was a young diligent cow-herder. Heaven Emperor arranged a meeting for marriage and they fell in love right away. But then, they forgot to do their duties. The cows became skinny and God's own clothing got worn out. Furious, Heaven Emperor separated the two to opposite sides of the Milky Way. Orihime was heartbroken and cried all day and night. Heaven Emperor was so touched by her tears He allowed the couple to meet once a year on July 7th.

The Star Festival was introduced to Japan in 755 A.D by Empress Kōken. It was at first celebrated only by aristocrats of the imperial court by stargazing, writing poetry, and contests held that day. The commoners adopted the holiday during the Edo period (1603-1868). Celebrations spread throughout Japan, with lights, good food and merriment. For the Star Festival girls and boys would write wishes on strips of paper to decorate bamboo trees, adding small lights & streamers.

In my childhood days my family placed a bamboo tree near the eves that had been decorated with paper strips, lamps and streamers and sang 'Tanabata-sama,' a children's song. The lyrics are:

"The first verse: 'The bamboo leaves rustle on the eves. The stars sparkle as gold and silver sands.'

The second verse: 'I wrote on five-colored strips of papers. The stars are twinkling, watching from the sky.'"

Listen while I sing the first verse of it in Japanese.

Star Festival is a festival celebrating love!

For these two lovers, Orihime & Hitoboshi, every second of that day was so precious. I am sure it was filled with every wish throughout the year they had so wanted to see each other. The two of them could not help but treasure every second they spent together on each July 7th.

Thinking of the Tanabata tale helped me to deepen my understanding of the Divine Reminder even much more, especially the last line, “On this very day, pray.” The Divine Reminder capture the essence of the Konko Faith.

-Divine Reminder-

Divine Parent of the Universe

Divine Mediator

Pray sincerely,
With all your heart,
Be one with Kami.

Kami’s blessings begin within
Hearts grateful and caring,
In harmony and joy.

Look to Kami always.
Now and forever.
On this very day, pray,

Here is my understanding of this Divine Reminder: “Through the Mediation of our Divine Mediator, Ikigami Konko Daijin, pray sincerely to the Divine Parent of the Universe, Tenchi Kane No Kami, that we respect each happening so to deepen peace & joy in our heart. On this very day, pray for this.”

Usually “On this day” is explained as: “That is exactly the meaning of today, this day. It shows that this day is the most important and foremost of days. Konko Daijin taught us, ‘Since the present is with Kami, we should pray to Kami anytime, on this very day.’ He taught to pray to Kami now, on this day, at this time and also urged us to change from a life that tends to be swept away by the times and caught up in difficulties and suffering to a life of faith in which we live with Kami, here and today.”

Through the story of Star Festival I cannot help but realize how precious each & every moment truly is. As much as possible we should treasure each & every happening of our daily lives with all my heart.

Everything that is happening to me is happening in such a mysterious way, Even the smallest things in our daily life are happenings in the mysterious ways of Kami. Sometimes they are outrageous or annoying happenings. Even so, we should treasure all happenings to cultivate our hearts.

When we can respect each precious happening with gratitude like our founder, we can manifest the true way of Konko and will be able to experience the same kind of Divine Works which our founder felt. It’s a world where amazing Divine Works are manifested, and no matter what we may do or say, Kami adjusts them to what is needed.

I feel my faith practice shall deepen from this point on. Because, as much as possible, like the spirit of Orihime and Hikoboshi meeting after being separated for one year, I'll treasure each moment as the best thing to use for developing more peace & joy in my heart.

Let us all respect each happening each and every moment, thinking each moment is always a once-in-a-lifetime experience, whatever may happen, and no matter how hard it might be.