**St. Bernadette, Abeokuta celebrates 70th anniversary**

**By James Adeniyi**

St. Bernadette Nursery/Primary School, Onikolobo, Abeokuta, recently rolled out drums to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the school.

The anniversary thanksgiving Mass was celebrated by the Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta, Most Rev. Dr. Peter Olukayode Odetoyinbo, with the Director of Education, Rev. Fr. Patrick Oke, Dean of Ss. Anne and Joachim, Ibara Deanery, Very Rev. Fr. Eric Olatunji, concelebrating.

Other Priests at the thanksgiving Mass included Parish Priest of St. Anne Catholic Church, Ibara, Rev. Fr. Paul Ijileke Administrator, Sacred Heart Hospital, Lantoro, Abeokuta, Rev. Fr. Peter Ogiator,

In his remark, Bishop Odetoyinbo commended the management and staff of the school for sustaining the legacies of the founder of the school (Mother Dunstan O'Driscoll, OLA).

He noted that the school has produced many great people that have contributed to the socio-economic development of Nigeria and the world at large.

In her welcome address, the Head Teacher of the School, Rev. Sr. Mary Ede commended the efforts of the Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) sisters, especially the founder of the school and all who have worked in the institution in the past 70 years.
Mother Dunstan's contribution to the development of education in Egbaland bagged her chieftains’ title of "Iya-ewe" of Egbaland (Mother of Children). The school started in 1944 as a convent school, and in 1954 it moved to Ibara as St. Bernadette School with only forty five pupils and three members of staff, but today it has grown to over a thousand population, with a staff strength of over ninety (teaching and non-teaching.

Mother Dunstan collaborated with other dedicated men and women, as well as with the support of the OLA Sisters working in Sacred Heart Hospital, Abeokuta brought the school to an enviable height.
The school has exhibited high academic standards, participated in JETS, mathematics, arts, and several other competitions and emerged as a winner.

St. Bernadette Primary School has, over the past seventy years, been graced with dedicated staff who have worked tirelessly to maintain the high educational standard of the school, academically, morally, and physically.

**Catholic Church is the real 'Pentecostal Church - Bishop Odetoyinbo

By James Adeniyi**

The Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta, Most Rev. Dr. Peter Olukayode Odetoyinbo has described the Catholic Church as the real Pentecostal Church, saying that the Church is very rich in tradition and evangelization.

According to Bishop Odetoyinbo, who dropped this hint at the 2024 Day of Consecrated Life, which was celebrated at St. Francis De Sales Catholic Church, Lemode, said that the Church is powerful spiritually and socially.

He noted that Catholic Church is involved in all areas of Jesus’ ministry; including health, education, justice and peace, family, care for the needy, as well as socialization among others, saying that through these that she brings Jesus message of salvation to all people, irrespective of their religious affiliations.

While stressing the importance of Consecrated persons in Catholic Church, Bishop Odetoyinbo noted that without them, Catholic Church is incomplete.

He commended the Parish Priest of St. Francis De-Sale, Lemode Parish, Very Rev. Fr. Francis Diyaolu and the parishioners for their zeal and tenacity in the promotion of evangelization in the community. He equally commended them for the new Church under construction.

Earlier in his homily, the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, Ijemo, Abeokuta, Rev. Fr. Joseph Edosomwa, ISch, reminded all the Consecrated persons that their Consecration was a gift from God.

He said, "God did not receive our Consecration because, we could give the best contribution in this ministry. We are giving the barest minimum. If God were to choose those to be Consecrated to Him based on merit, we may not be among. There are lay people who are better administrators than us. There are people out there who will perform the work of the ministry better than us. There are better prayer warriors than us.

"So dear brothers and sisters, we were not consciously chosen and taken as important by God because we are the best or we are able to give the best. Rather, we were chosen because God is good always and God knows that the efficiency, power, strength and wisdom and all the good we will need for the Consecrated life is in Him, not in us".

"Our ministry will only be fruitful if we totally give ourselves and consecrate ourselves to Him.

"Have we fully given ourselves to God? Are our bodies, minds, faculties, powers, strength, intelligence, and so on fully given and consecrated to God? Are we still keeping a percentage of ourselves for ourselves?"

He lamented that some of the Consecrated persons trade themselves with God on a business level and they keep the majority of what is to be traded, advising that "each one should search within him or herself; what percentage of myself have I given and consecrated to God and what percentage have I been keeping for myself?

"In the community life, how many percent of yourself are you giving? If we all give 100 percent of ourselves to the community, to the Diocese because of our 100 percent consecration to God, community life and life in the Diocese will be better than this".

"Same goes for our Apostolate, our Prayer life, our vows of Chastity, Obedience and Poverty. How many percent of yourself have you given to these? Am I sure I have given to God 100 percent of myself in the vow of Poverty? What about Obedience to your superior and to the Diocesan Bishop?"

"There is one truth we must face: most of the troubles and problems we run into in this Consecrated life are as a result of the fact that we are only Consecrated partially to God. If we are truthful with ourselves, we would accept that this partial consecration is the source of many crisis, problems, setbacks, frustrations, depression, we face in the Consecrated Life".

The Bishop during the celebration, blessed the grotto of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph; the first of its kind in the Diocese.

**Lagos Province launches 'Marriage Preparation Curriculum'**

Author?
The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Lagos Ecclesiastical Province (LEP) has launched a comprehensive Marriage Preparation Curriculum to prepare couples aspiring towards the vocation to Christian marriage for the long haul and bring down the country’s high rate of divorce.

According to the Lagos Conference, the primary objective of the curriculum is to promote better and more intensive programmes of marriage preparation, and subsequently eliminate as much as possible, the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in post marriage.

The comprehensive premarital curriculum was unveiled during the Opening Session of the 2024 first Plenary meeting of the CBCN, Lagos Ecclesiastical Province held recently at St. Agnes Catholic Church, Maryland, Lagos. Speaking at the brief launch ceremony, Most Rev. (Dr.) Alfred Adewale Martins, Chairman of CBCN, LEP, and Archbishop of the Metropolitan See of Lagos stated that the curriculum is of great importance to the Church, considering the values it portends for the good of the spouses, Church and the society at large.

He said, “In the past, the support of the society could be counted on in this regard because such values were held in high esteem. Experiences of the recent past, however, have witnessed the deterioration and corrosion of these values to the detriment of the sanctity of marriage and family life. “It has also resulted in a myriad of complications, challenges and eventual breakdowns of which Christian marriage and family are the chief victims. Consequently, this development has necessitated an urgency in the area of preparation of marriage because it has caused questions to be raised and solutions to be sought. “Indeed, it became necessary to ask if the persons contracting marriage are really prepared for it, and if they understand what they are preparing for.”

The Lagos Province Episcopal Conference Chairman outlined the essence of the Comprehensive Marriage Preparation curriculum, produced specifically for the intending couples in the Archdiocese of Lagos as well as the Dioceses of Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta. “We present this Curriculum to all those involved in the preparation of young people for marriage, comprising Pastors (Priests), Parents, Marriage Preparation Facilitators, Counsellors, other experts and the family at large. “Our plan is to give them a comprehensive tool that engages every stage of marriage preparation from childhood to adulthood, in a gradual and continuous process of formation. “

This extensive curriculum is an initiative to address with focus and renewed resolve, the deterioration and corrosion of family values that has led to the breakdown of marriages and destruction of family life, including the challenges young people face in matters of sexuality. “The aim of the curriculum is to guide the process of marriage formation in a way to enable families undertake the great task of building their families with loving attention and care. We also need to proclaim to our young people God’s good news about human love and sexuality, as it is bound up in a deepened understanding of our human dignity and intrinsic worth.” Observing that the Curriculum for the Lagos Ecclesiastical Province has long been a missing instrumentum laboris, Archbishop Martins further stated, “It is the goal of the Curriculum to fill this vacuum and offer to Pastors of souls, their collaborators, family and human life facilitators and intending couples, a unified and common programme of marriage preparation. “

The Curriculum has also taken cognizance of the peculiarities of the varied local contexts within the Province and sets forth an uncompromising Gospel of the values of marriage and family that the Church advocates and teaches. “The Curriculum provides a template, as well as guidelines for the Marriage Preparation Course which, though it allows for some local adjustments, will in its general outline, effect a good level of uniformity for the local Churches in our Province.”

ARTICLES

**Hardship, Insecurity, Others: Nigerians going through 'worst of times' - Catholic Bishops**
Author?
The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, CBCN, has issued a stark assessment of the current situation in the country, describing it as the 'worst of times,' particularly in regard to security and the economy.

During the opening session of the 2024 First Plenary Assembly of the Conference, the CBCN President, Archbishop Lucius Ugorji, expressed deep concerns and described the state of affairs in the nation as tumultuous.

The Archbishop drew attention to the stark realities facing Nigerians, emphasizing the persistent insecurity and economic turmoil despite substantial security votes.

"If we cast a cursory glance at the present state of our nation, we are inclined to conclude that this seems to be the worst of times for our country in the areas of security and the economy," he said.

According to him, kidnappings for ransom, senseless killings, and the rise of banditry have left communities across Nigeria in the grip of fear and paralysis.

"Unarmed citizens are brutally slaughtered on our highways, in their homes and even in the sacred precincts of places of worship. Killer herdsmen, bandits and unknown gunmen seem to be on rampage. Many communities across the nation have been taken over completely by criminals. Families have lost their ancestral lands to armed invaders and land-grabbers," the Archbishop lamented.

He emphasized the severity of the situation where citizens are brutally attacked in what should be sanctuaries of peace.

In the same vein, the Archbishop criticized the government's reform agenda, which has led to the withdrawal of fuel subsidies and a steep decline in the Naira's value.

He painted a grim picture of the hardship faced by millions as a result of these economic policies.

According to him, "The reform agenda of the present government has added to the plight of Nigerians.

"With the withdrawal of fuel subsidies and the unification of the foreign exchange market, there has been a sharp increase in the pump price of petroleum products and a steep decline in the value of the Naira.

"Indeed, there is a free fall of the national currency. High spiralling inflation has made it difficult for the average Nigerian to access basic commodities, including food items and medication.

"As a result of the government's reform agenda, millions of Nigerians have been reduced to a life of grinding poverty, wanton suffering, and untold hardship as never before in our national history. In a bid to survive, an increasing number of the poor have resorted to begging."

The CBCN President also touched upon the government's lavish spending amidst a population crippled by poverty.

"As the government demands additional sacrifice from the struggling masses, one would expect to see a drastic cut in the cost of running the government at all levels.

"On the contrary, it is worrisome to watch top government functionaries living by the sweat, toil and tears of the poor. They continue spending huge public funds on ostentatious and luxurious lifestyles and seem incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor.

"It is no less worrisome to note that corruption among many public servants has gone beyond scale and measure.

"Corruption is a complex reality involving moral rottenness, defilement and loss of integrity. In Nigeria, it spans a wide spectrum, ranging from book- cooking, foreign exchange (FX) arbitrage, over-pricing, and over- invoicing to embezzlement, money laundering, forgery, and all sorts of manipulation," he stated, condemning the rampant corruption and mismanagement of resources.

Additionally, the Archbishop underscored the plight of Nigerian youth, many of whom are unemployed and resort to drugs, alcohol, or emigration in desperation.

He called attention to the long-term consequences of such a loss of human capital.

Archbishop Ugorji said, "The situation is worsened by the high unemployment rate in the country. Many of our youths are deeply wounded and degraded by unemployment and poverty, which make them feel rejected by the very society into which they were born.

"Consequently, thousands of them seek relief from drugs and alcohol and eventually end up in violent crimes. In search of greener pastures, many others try to migrate to foreign lands, where hard times often await them.

"Regrettably, an extensive brain drain continues in this way in our nation, where manpower is needed to revamp the ailing economy and foster national development. In the midst of the frenzy to "japa" abroad for better job opportunities, many young Nigerians fall easy prey to human traffickers, who traffic them abroad for sexual exploitation, cheap labour or organ harvesting."

The Catholic Bishops were equally critical of the government's efforts to address these issues, calling the reform agenda 'counterproductive' and a 'therapy worse than the disease.'

The CBCN challenged the government's claims of savings from fuel subsidy removal, questioning the lack of operational refineries which leads to continued reliance on fuel importation.

They said, "In withdrawing the fuel subsidy, the government assured Nigerians it would save a lot of money to be injected into other national development sectors.

"Rather than give evidence of money so far saved from the withdrawal of subsidies for which Nigerians are being afflicted with untold hardship, all we hear is the government's accumulation of more and more foreign debts to balance its budgetary deficit, thereby mortgaging the future of our nation and generations yet unborn.

"This has led many Nigerians to conclude that all the extensive talks on fuel subsidies may be mere fairy tales.

"Nigeria owns four refineries, two in Port Harcourt, one in Warri and one in Kaduna. How can we explain that these four refineries have remained moribund for years despite turn-around-maintenance efforts, which have continued to gulp huge sums of money?"

On the security front, the CBCN President described the government's efforts as 'woefully failing' and urged for more proactive measures to protect citizens.

"Without security, there can be no development," Archbishop Ugorji asserted, pointing out the vital link between employment opportunities for youth and national security.

According to the Bishops, corruption, too, remains a pressing concern. They however called for a more effective prosecution of corrupt officials to prevent the continued looting of public coffers.

The Catholic Bishops further touched on the controversy surrounding the recent Vatican document "Fiducia Supplicans," which has stirred debate among the faithful.

While the document prohibits blessings for same-sex unions, it also encourages pastoral care for those in 'irregular situations.'

The Bishops called for sincerity, accountability, and a collective effort to steer Nigeria away from its current trajectory towards a more secure and prosperous future.

**\*\*\*\*CAN backs Catholic Bishops**
In a show of ecumenical support and solidarity, the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), His Eminence Archbishop (Dr) Daniel Okoh, commended Archbishop Ugorji for his unwavering commitment to addressing issues such as bad governance, insecurity, injustice, and economic hardships.

Okoh stated, "Your consistency in providing insight and guidance on issues that border on bad governance, insecurity (including food insecurity), injustice and extreme economic conditions is an inspiration to us all."

Referencing the unique theme of the plenary, 'Synod on Synodality,' Archbishop Okoh expressed intrigue and support for the Catholic Church's efforts to foster inclusivity and dialogue.

"Such conversations may bring challenges, but they are essential for unity and impactful evangelism," he added, affirming his prayers for the Holy Spirit's guidance during the plenary.

Archbishop Okoh also acknowledged the daunting challenges faced by churches in Nigeria, from constant attacks on clergy to the struggle for the right to worship places.

"As members of the Nigerian Christian community, we acknowledge the multifaceted challenges faced by our Churches on a daily basis.

"From a deliberate attempt to edge out Christianity in certain parts of the country through denial of Right of Occupancy for churches that want to erect their worship places to targeted serial attacks, arson and kidnapping of clergymen for ransom that has now become a daily occurrence. The high level of insecurity, runaway inflation and hunger are areas of serious concern as well

"I am confident that these issues will be discussed with sincerity and humility," he expressed, hopeful for positive outcomes from the assembly.

**\*\*\*\*\*Akume highlights FG's efforts amidst economic challenges**
Senator George Akume, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, addressed the assembly, expressing gratitude for the participation and acknowledging the Catholic Church's vital role in Nigerian society.

Despite inherited socio-economic challenges, Senator Akume outlined the Tinubu administration's achievements in various sectors, including agriculture, food security, health, national security, and economic reforms.

He said, "Let me at this point, place on record that despite the humongous inherited and emerging socio-economic challenges, the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has in less than nine months on the saddle recorded positive accomplishments in diverse sector."

He emphasized the government's commitment to reversing the current hardships through strategic policies and investments aimed at transforming the economy and ensuring inclusive growth.

As the nation observes Lent, a time of reflection and penitence, Senator Akume called for faith and perseverance.

"We must remain steadfast in our resolve," he urged, highlighting the government's determination to tackle security issues, economic challenges, and improve the quality of life for all Nigerians.

The Secretary to the Government of the Federation also praised the Bishops for their spiritual guidance and dialogue, stressing that the government deeply values the church's counsel and support.

**\*\*\*\*Archbishop Kaigama emphasizes resource management**
Earlier, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, Archbishop of Abuja, in his homily, underscored the importance of using Nigeria's abundant talents and natural resources to elevate the nation.

He lamented the current state of affairs where potential is stifled by poor governance and corruption.

"We must rise to the challenge and harness our god-given talents for the betterment of our society," Archbishop Kaigama urged.

**‘Church in Nigeria must pay attention to doctrinal deviations, pastoral malpractices,’ Fr. Akinwale appeals to Catholic Bishops**
Author?
The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, Lagos, Rev. Fr. (Prof.) Anthony Akinwale has appealed to Catholic Bishops in Nigeria to pay attention to doctrinal deviations, liturgical aberrations, and pastoral malpractice, which appear to be going on in the church unnoticed.

Rev. Fr. (Prof.) Akinwale, in his paper on Synod on Synodality: Areas of concern for the Church in Nigeria, lamented that in Nigeria, the Catholic space has been invaded by Pentecostalism, and noted that this should be of more concern to the Nigerian church than blessing of same-sex couples.

“It is a well-known fact that in Nigeria, our Catholic space has been invaded by Pentecostalism. I prefer to call it contemporary Nigerian religiosity in its expression within and outside the Catholic Church. This is a greater concern than blessing of same-sex couples. We have witnessed an explosion of new religious communities some with little or nothing in terms of spirituality and charism of consecrated life. Thankfully, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria looked into this phenomenon.”

Prof. Akinwale who was addressing the Conference of Nigerian Catholic Bishops during the CBCN first 2024 plenary assembly, noted one important phenomenon the Conference needs to look at, is not to stifle but to discern the Spirit. He emphasised that the explosion of ministries in the Church in Nigeria established and patronized by some priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful have eroded the credibility of Christianity, of Catholicism in particular, in the country.

“Some of these ministries and ministers pretend to be Catholic. They even display statues of our Blessed on their websites or expose the Blessed Sacrament in a way that points to sacrilege. Fake prophecies and arrangee miracles are being touted before a traumatized, bewildered and gullible populace while shepherds fail to rescue the flock from ravening, ravaging and manipulative wolves.

“The populism of these ministries, the advertisement of un-authenticated miracles and prophecies, the opium these ministries administer on our people, erode the credibility of Christianity, of Catholicism in particular, in our country.”

Explaining that the ongoing synod is not a political consensus, but in the ecclesial sense of the word, the desire to be in communion with God who is truth, advised that it should never be an arrogant pretension that they have found the truth, but rather, a unity in their desire to be found by Truth.

Prof. Akinwale who is the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, Lagos, urged that despite these risks, the Church of our time, the Church in Nigeria in particular, must develop the courage of martyrs of old in receiving, preserving and transmitting the Gospel that comes to them from the apostles. He challenged the church to exercise this courage by identifying, raising and addressing issues of concern for apostolic tradition, for the synodal process, and for social and ecclesial realities that confront her.

**‘Fight against insecurity, a tall dream if massive unemployment is not addressed,’ CBCN cautions FG**

Worried over the alarming rate of insecurity, killings and banditry in the country, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria lamented that there can be no meaningful development in any country without adequate security, and emphasised that security in our country will remain a tall dream if mass unemployment exists among our youths.

“The government does not need to reinvent the wheel since it can easily learn from what other nations do to provide adequate security for its citizens. It goes without saying that there cannot be any meaningful development in any country without adequate security. It will be belabouring the obvious to state that security in our country will remain a tall dream if mass unemployment exists among our youths.”

In an address delivered by the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji, during the opening ceremony for the 2024 first plenary assembly of the Conference, the President decried the worsening rate of unemployment in the country among the youths who are deeply wounded and degraded by unemployment and poverty. He further explained that this menace of employment have made the youths feel rejected by the very society into which they were born, while thousands of them seek relief from drugs and alcohol and eventually end up in violent crimes.

Commenting on the reform agenda of the present administration, the CBCN President noted that the withdrawal of fuel subsidies and the unification of the foreign exchange market, has led to a sharp increase in the pump price of petroleum products, a steep decline in the value of the Naira and a high spiralling inflation which has made it difficult for the average Nigerian to access basic commodities, including food items and medication.

“As a result of the government’s reform agenda, millions of Nigerians have been reduced to a life of grinding poverty, wanton suffering, and untold hardship as never before in our national history. In a bid to survive, an increasing number of the poor have resorted to begging. With more than 80 million Nigerians living under the poverty line of less than two dollars a day, our country, according to the recent disclosure of the World Bank, is the world’s second-largest poor population after India.

“While many impoverished Nigerians continue to suffer and die as a result of the hardship caused by the government’s economic reforms, the president has continued to urge the populace to make even more and more sacrifices with the assurance that brighter days lay ahead.”

The CBCN President reiterated the stance of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria on the Fiducia Supplicans document of the Holy Father, Pope Francis that there is no possibility of blessing same-sex couples or same-sex unions in the Church in Africa.

“In line with our earlier Clarification and the Declaration of SECAM, we must continue to teach our faithful that there is no possibility of blessing same-sex couples or same-sex unions in the Church in Africa.

"Homosexual acts are acts of grave depravity, which are intrinsically disordered and, above all, contrary to natural law (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2357).

"In furtherance of our pastoral and prophetic mission, we must also continue to stress that God loves the sinner unconditionally and calls him to repentance so that he might live. As sinners, we are all encouraged to emulate the Prodigal Son, who abandoned his sinful past and returned to his father’s house (cf. Lk 15:11 – 32).”

**Insecurity: Catholic Bishops endorse State Police**
The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has called for the consideration and careful study of establishing State Police to combat the growing insecurity plaguing the nation.

They also urged the government to create a conducive environment for agriculture and to decentralize power in certain economic sectors to spur growth and reduce unemployment.

These recommendations were contained in a communiqué issued at the end of their week-long First Plenary Meeting, held at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Abuja, from February 16 to 22, 2024.

The communique signed by Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, the Archbishop of Owerri and Most Rev. Donatus A. Ogun, OSA, Bishop of Uromi Diocese, President and Secretary of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), respectfully.

The bishops, who deliberated extensively on the theme: 'Synod on Synodality: Areas of Concern for the Church in Nigeria,' also reflected on the dire situation of the nation.

"The legitimacy of government depends on its capacity to protect life and property," they asserted, highlighting the urgent need for the government to act decisively against the surge in insecurity that has plagued the country.

With insurgents, armed herdsmen, bandits, and unknown gunmen causing widespread havoc, and kidnappings reaching previously safe areas, the bishops voiced their solidarity with the suffering masses.

"In view of the government's effort to end insecurity, we recommend that the ongoing discussion about the creation of State Police be carefully studied. Furthermore, the government ought to assess the impact of all other already existing security outfits in this regard," the communique read in part.

The Bishops lamented the growing number of internally displaced persons and the failure of the economy to support the populace, leading to increased poverty and hardship.

The bishops did not shy away from addressing the nation's economic woes, acknowledging the government's efforts but pointing out the shortcomings of certain policies, including fuel subsidy removal and the floating of the Naira, which have had adverse effects on the populace.

In proposing a way forward, they  also called for government efforts to improve the agricultural sector and create small-scale industries in rural areas to boost productivity and reduce unemployment.

The Communique added, "Given the diminishing purchasing power of the Nigerian currency, and the capacity of agriculture to be the bedrock of our survival, we urge the government to create the necessary and conducive environment that would enable our people to return to their farms.

"We commend the government's decision to transfer some items, such as electricity and railways, from the exclusive list to the concurrent list. We urge that this be extended to other areas of the economy like mining. These measures, along with transparency and accountability in governance, are some of the factors that promote social cohesion.

"We enjoin the government at all levels to establish small-scale industries in rural areas to increase productivity and reduce unemployment. It would be helpful if such industries are agro-based."

In the communiqué, the bishops emphasized the critical role of the media in nation-building and called for respect for media workers' rights and responsible use of social media.

Highlighting the theme of their deliberations, 'Synod on Synodality: Areas of Concern for the Church in Nigeria,' the bishops emphasized the importance of walking together and listening to each other in addressing the challenges facing the nation.

Consequently, the CBCN urged all segments of the Nigerian community to contribute positively, beyond political affiliations, to address the nation's challenges, advocating for a united effort in national rebirth.

They said, "We enjoin the government to open up to the contribution of all segments and levels of the Nigerian community, so that together, we can face the emergency situation in which we now find ourselves. It is no longer acceptable for our leaders to surround themselves only with their political supporters and cronies.

"The general elections and determination of petitions are now over. It is time to run the government for the common good. The nation needs to leave all polarizations behind and come together in unity and cohesion. We have both the natural and human resources to get this done.

"But those now in political power owe the nation the duty to create the enabling environment for all capable Nigerians to participate in the task of national rebirth.

"Politicians who are not in power and all other Nigerians should now be ready to offer their positive contribution, beyond all political party affiliation and sensitivities."

They praised the existing structures within the Church that promote synodality but called for a strengthening of these institutions to enhance dialogue and participation.

**CATHEDRATICUM CELEBRATION

Bishop Odetoyinbo blames present hardship on Nigerians disobedience

By James Adeniyi**
The Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta, Most Rev. Dr. Peter Olukayode Odetoyinbo has blamed all Nigerians, for the current economic hardship in the country, saying that the citizens' disobedience to God's commandments has led to the present economic challenges.

Bishop Odetoyinbo, who said this in his homily at St. Julius Agbado Deanery Cathedraticum celebration, held at St. Anthony Catholic Church, Adiyan, said Nigerians have abandoned God's ways and commandments.

According to the local ordinary of Abeokuta Diocese, rather than doing the will of God, Nigerians have made corruption, nepotism, favoritism, greed, selfishness, cheating and other vices part of their lives.

Bishop Odetoyinbo charged Nigerians to be appreciative to God, positing that there are some countries that have nothing to eat.

"Though, there is hardship in the country, but our situation in Nigeria is still far better than some other countries in the continent; such as Sudan, South Sudan, where they have nothing to eat.

"Nigeria is a good country, blessed by God, but through corruption, nepotism, favoritism, greed, the country has been bastardized. All the God-given gifts have been mismanaged and people are now suffering.

He therefore challenged all Nigerians, irrespective of their status to retrace their steps, acknowledge their sinfulness, seek for His forgiveness and mercy, and obey His commandments for the country to be great again.

"Though, our leaders have responsibilities to make life comfortable for the citizens, the citizens; individually and collectively also have roles to be to make the country a better place for everyone to live.

"If we want this country to be great again, all Nigerians should turn away from their sinful ways, do the will of God and be good citizens.

#@@@@@

 **Pray for Nigeria- Bishop Odetoyinbo charge Catholics

By James Adeniyi**

Catholics in Abeokuta Diocese and beyond, have been asked to pray for Nigeria everyday.

According to the Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta, Most Rev. Dr. Peter Olukayode Odetoyinbo, who at the 2024 Cathedraticum celebration of Mary Queen of Nigeria, Akute Deanery, held at Our Lady Queen of Peace, Olambe, said that the prayer of believers is what is still sustaining the country.

The Bishop charged Nigerians to acknowledge their sinfulness and appreciate the gift and sacrifices of Jesus Christ in saving human beings from final condemnation.

He cautioned the faithful to stop giving conditions before they accept and follow Jesus Christ, stressing that as his followers, we have to accept and follow without any conditions.

He said, "always carry your cross daily and follow Jesus Christ, because his love, sacrifices, forgiveness and mercy to humanity were beyond comprehension and understand.

He added that the season of lent reminds the faithful of the pain and suffering of Christ to save us from damnation.

**Bishop Odetoyinbo erects St. Jude, Ijuri Parish

By James Adeniyi**

The Parish of St. Jude Catholic Church, Ijuri, in St. Pio, Agbara Deanery has been Canonical erected by the Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta, Most Rev. Dr. Peter Olukayode Odetoyinbo.

The Canonical erection of the Parish, took place during the 2024 Cathedraticum celebration of the Deanery, which took place at the Parish, on Wednesday 6th March, 2024.

In his homily, Bishop Odetoyinbo said, "as your parish is canonically erected today with installation of tabernacle , there must be spiritual change in your attitude; both spiritually and physically. Your physical appearance must reflect your faith and glorify God. Now, that you have tabernacle, a dwelling place for Christ, you must always reverence Jesus Christ whenever you are in the Church premises or even passing in front of the Church.

Speaking on the importance of tabernacle in Catholic Church, Bishop Odetoyinbo, said, it is the sign of Jesus presence in the Church, urging the faithful to create time to adore Jesus Christ in the tabernacle at all times.

He encouraged the parishioners to protect and safeguard the church’s property especially the Tabernacle and enjoined the faithful to offer themselves in totality to God through open and sincere adoration in the Blessed Sacrament.

“Always approach God with humility and contrite heart, for Him to bless you. Go to Jesus with your problems, anxieties in the tabernacle, he is ever ready to accept and bless you at all times.
Jesus Christ is always ready to accept us with our burdens of life and give us rest, only if we can approach Him", he added.

He commended both the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Joseph Elegbede and the parishioners for advancing the work of God in the community.

On the Cathedraticum celebration, Bishop Odetoyinbo enjoined the people of God to always glorify God for the gift of Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our salvation, his mercy, benevolence and numerous blessings in our lives.

Bishop Odetoyinbo challenged the faithful to be generous with their wealth, pointing out that their donations and gifts in the Church are intercessory for God's grace and mercy in their lives.

**AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIVING AND ITS CHALLENGES TODAY**

**By Prof. Michael Ogunu**

***International President of the***

***World Apostolate of Fatima***

**Introduction**

One of the demands made in many walks of life is for authenticity. We live in a world of shallow imitations where hypocrisy is the order of the day. A lot of people who go to Church resemble Christians but they lack real authenticity. They have no living vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Hence, we have Christians who go to Church on Sundays and perhaps attend Morning Mass everyday but in moments of crisis, they go to native doctors or fortune tellers or self-styled prophets in Pentecostal churches to find solution to their problems; that is why also a trader who proclaims to be a Christian sees nothing wrong in selling fake products to a Catholic Priest who comes to patronize him. What shall we say about the Christian youth who is a member of some Marian societies but sees nothing wrong in nude dressing or use of contraceptives? The list is endless.

What does it mean to live an authentic Christian life? Authentic Christian life is life based on the model which Jesus Christ, Son of God and the founder of the Catholic Church has set before us. Authentic Christianity never needs advertisement or publicity. It gives off a fragrance and a fascination that attracts people like flies are attracted to honey.

The most subtle stratagem ever devised by Satan to deceive and mislead people is that of causing Christians to practice sham Christianity before the world. In sharp contrast to this is authentic Christianity as its founder Jesus Christ himself intended it to be.

**Marks of authentic Christian living**

Here are unmistakable marks of authentic Christian living:

* The authentic Christian **patterns his life after the life of Jesus:** “Let the same mind be found in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8). Note the key phrase: Jesus “emptied Himself”. He set aside the prerogatives and powers of Godhood in order to identify fully with us. He lived the same kind of life we lived, facing temptation, suffering, pain and sorrow, enduring frustration, just as we do. He approached life the same way you and I must approach life: living in dependence on God the Father, seeking guidance and strength through continual prayer, trusting God and listening to His leading, and being humbly obedient. That is why the authentic Christian must “let the same mind be in him that was in Christ Jesus”. That is authentic Christianity – Christianity in its truest, purest, most distilled form. That is the Christianity which you and I are to follow, the only Christianity worthy of the name.
* The authentic Christian loyally **defers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church and follows the lead of the Holy Spirit**, Who assures us that even in the midst of tragedy or a troubling or threatening series of events, He will give us His peace, that peace “which surpasseth all understanding”. The Acts of the Apostles are filled with instances of guidance by the Holy Spirit. As one reads the multiple testimonies of Peter, Paul and other disciples about how the Spirit guided them to and from specific towns and circumstances, one gets the feeling that the direct experience of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church was almost commonplace (see Acts 8:28-30; 10:18-20; 11:12; 13:4; 16:6-8; 19:20-22; 20:21-23; 21:3-5). The Holy Spirit guides us in our long-term plans, vocations and choices in life.
* Another unmistakable mark of authentic Christianity is **unimpeachable integrity**. Webster’s dictionary defines integrity as “the quality of state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty and sincerity”. In the whole of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, we see integrity as a valid, desirable character trait. From God’s perspective, one who has integrity must be of sound moral principle, upright, honest, and sincere in conduct. The authentic Christian does not indulge in hypocrisy or pretence but speaks and acts before God and man with sincerity. In other words, we are to be honest people. We must mean what we say. The world admires sincerity and feels it is the ultimate expression of character; but according to Paul, sincerity is just the beginning of character, God’s minimum expectations of authentic Christians. The very least we should expect from ourselves as Christians and which the world expects from us is that we thoroughly believe and practice what we say.

Closely allied to this is an attitude of **transparency**, of openness to investigation. That is what Paul means when he says that whatever we do should be done “before God” or “in the sight of God”. To walk in the sight of other people permits us to hide our sins and contradictions behind a façade but to walk in the sight of God requires total honesty with Him and with ourselves because nothing can be hidden from God’s sight. This does not mean we can live sinlessly, but rather that there must be no cover-up or evasion of the facts of our sin when it occurs. It means there are no areas of denial. All is evaluated and tested by the purity and knowledge and wisdom of God — and what is sinful, we confess and we repent of before God. A man who walks in the sight of God is more interested in his inner reality than his outer reputation.

* **Being able to trust in God** is another quality of being an authentic Christian. ‘Many times’, says Dr. Dobbins, author of *How to be an Authentic Christian,* ‘we as professed Christians are great warriors. But as we grow in relationship with Christ, we learn how to trust God. We learn how to commit things to Him in prayer and we find that he is faithful to respond to our prayers’. Solomon said “Trust in the Lord with all thine hearts, and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all thy ways, acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).
* Yet another characteristic of the authentic Christian is his **faithfulness to daily duty**, that is, the duty of one’s state in life. The authentic Christian does not neglect his duty but does it faithfully as enjoined by Paul in Col. 3:23-24 when he says “whatever you do, do it with all your heart as though you were working for God and not for men … for Christ is the real master you serve”.

In 1943, Venerable Sr. Lucia, one of the three shepherd children to whom Our Lady appeared in Fatima in 1917 and revealed many secrets of eternal salvation and world peace said that our Lord told her that “the sacrifice required of every person is the observance of God’s law and the faithful fulfillment of one’s daily duty”. From the first moment of Our Lady’s meeting with the little shepherd, the Virgin of Fatima spoke directly to them of this serious duty of every Christian. Neglect of business and domestic duties under pretext of piety is a fairly common fault. Devotees, especially of the female sex, often fall into this error, and so give scandal even to sensible and really religious people. Yet it is not piety that is to blame, but rather their self-will which is followed instead of the spirit of God.

Many have no sooner taken up the practices of reli­gion than they start neglecting their homes, their children, and those dependent upon them. They spend the day going to church, in running after popular preachers, attending every religious service and special festival, and in undertaking all manner of good works. They are to be found everywhere except at home, which they leave as early, and return to as late, as possible.

Meanwhile, all is disorder in the household; every­one does as he pleases in the absence of the mistress. Children are left to the doubtful care of those who themselves want looking after; or they are dragged about, especially if girls, from service to service, until they are wearied out and disgusted, and soon begin to tire of religion. The husband very rightly complains, but his word is not heeded, and he is secretly accused of not being sufficiently devout.

And thus it is, too, with many men. They are active, bustling busybodies; meddling in everything under the pretext of serving God; fancying that the Church depends on them. They concern themselves with the affairs of others, and neglect their own. Even some priests are not entirely exempt from these and similar faults. They are zealous, but, as St. Paul says, not according to knowledge. They allow their natural acti­vity full rein, and because their ministry is spread over many objects, insinuate themselves into everything and imagine that all good works must pass through their hands, otherwise they will not succeed. They are for ever coming and going, and the day is not long enough for all they have to do. They even borrow from the night, and leave themselves barely time to say their office.

* Another characteristic of an authentic Christian is **chastity and purity of heart**. Describing the value of chastity, God Himself says in Ecclesiasticus 26:20 that “no price is worthy of a continent soul”. All that man prizes and esteems, riches, pleasures, honours, bear no comparison to a continent soul.

St. Ephrem calls chastity “the life of the spirit”. St. Peter Damian styles it “the queen of virtues”, and St. Cyprian says by means of chastity we celebrate the most glorious triumphs. He who conquers the vice opposed to this virtue will easily triumph over the rest. On the contrary, he who permits himself to be ruled by incontinency (impurity) falls an easy prey to the other vices such as hatred, injustice, etc. Chastity, says St. Ephrem, renders us in a certain sense like angels. This comparison is altogether justified, for the life of angels is far from being a life of carnal gratifications. Angels are pure by nature; chaste souls are pure by reason of virtue. “On account of the merit of this virtue”, says Cassian, “human beings are placed on a level with the angels”. “Of course there is a difference”, says St. Ber­nard, “between the chaste man and the angel, but it is not a difference of virtue; it is only one of happiness. If the chastity of the angels is more blessed, the chastity of man is more courageous”.

Our body is the most powerful weapon the devil possesses to make us his slaves. On this account it is seldom that a man comes forth victorious from this conflict. “The struggle for chastity”, says St. Augustine, “is the most violent of all; the battle is renewed every day, and victory is rare”. “How many unfortunate per­sons there are”, says St. Lawrence Justinian, “who hav­ing spent long years in solitude amid prayer, fasting and mortification, yielded at last to sensuality, gave up their holy life, and with the loss of chastity suffered the loss of God”.

* **Love of God and neighbour** is yet another significant hallmark of an authentic Christian. It is impossible to love the Lord our God without at the same time loving our neighbour. The commandment that obliges us to love our God, obliges us also to love our neighbour. “And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God, love also his brother” (1 John 4:21). From these words of the Apostle, St. Thomas Aquinas concludes that the one virtue of love embraces the love of God and the love of our neighbour. St. Jerome tells us that when the disciples of St. John the Evangelist asked him why he spoke so often of brotherly love, he replied: “Because it is the command­ment of the Lord, and the fulfilment of this alone is sufficient for eternal salvation”.

St. Catherine of Genoa once said to Our Lord: “O my God, Thou commandest me to love my neighbour, and I can love no one but Thee”. Our Saviour replied: “My daughter, whoever loves Me loves everything that is loved by Me”. Why, therefore, must we love our neighbour? Because he is loved by God. St. John was therefore right when he called him a liar who says that he loves God but hates his neighbour. Our Lord has promised that He will regard as done to Himself what we do for the least of our brethren: “Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). From this St. Catherine of Genoa concludes: “If you wish to know how much a person loves his God, see how much he loves his neighbour”.

A very important duty of charity towards our neigh­bour consists in giving him alms when he is poor and needy and we ourselves are in a position to do so:

“He that hath mercy on the poor”, says the Holy Spirit, “lendeth to the Lord; and he will repay him” (Prov. 19:17). If we can do nothing else let us at least recommend him to God, for prayer is also an alms. “He that shall see his brother in need”, says St. John, “and shall shut up his heart against him, how doth the charity of God abide in him” (1 John 3:17). “With what measure you meet it shall be measured to you”, says our Blessed Redeemer (Matt. 7:2). St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi said she would feel happier by assisting her neighbour than if she were raised to heavenly contemplation: “If I am in contemplation”, said she, “God is helping me; if I assist my neighbour I am helping God”. This is very true, for Our Lord Him­self said: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren you do to me”. (Matt. 25:40).

* Closely allied to the preceding characteristicis being **charitable towards our enemies**. “Love your enemies”, says Our Lord, “do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:44). How sad it is to see Christians who go to Church and even to Holy Communion and still retain enmity in their hearts! If anyone has injured us, and we wish to revenge, we should try to act as the saints have done. St. Paulinus tells us that to love one's enemy is a heavenly revenge. St. Catherine of Siena took revenge on a woman who had attacked her honour, and this was her revenge: During a long and severe illness which the woman suffered, St. Catherine waited on her as a ser­vant. St. Acacius sold his possessions in order to assist a man who had robbed him of his good name. St. Ambrose supported a man who had made an attempt on his life.
* The authentic Christian practices the virtue of **obedience and trustful surrender to Divine Providence**. *“You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you”* (John 15:14) Perfection consists in the conformity of our will to the will of God.

The greatest sacrifice that a soul can make to God is obedience to Him; for as, in the opinion of St. Thomas, “nothing is dearer to us than the liberty of our will”, we can offer to God no more acceptable gift than this very liberty. “Obe­dience is better than sacrifice”, says the Holy Spirit (1 Kings 15:22); that is to say, God prefers obedience to all other sacrifices. He who gives his property to God by distributing it among the poor; his honor, by pa­tiently bearing contempt; his body, by fasts and peni­tential works, gives Him a part of himself. But he who offers God his will, by subjecting it to obedience, gives Him all he has, and can truly say: “My Lord, after I have given Thee my will, I have nothing more to give”. As St. Gregory says: “By the other virtues we give to God what belongs to us; by obedience we give Him ourselves”. The same saint teaches that all the other virtues follow in the train of obedience and by its in­fluence are preserved in the soul.