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CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA, CATECHESIS FOR FRIDAY 25 JANUARY 2019  
WORLD YOUTH DAY CELEBRATION IN PANAMA**

**THEME: LET IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.**

**1. INTRODUCTION/GREETINGS:** Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ who through his Blessed Virgin Mother has given us these beautiful words; “Let it be done to me according to your word.” These words constitute the theme of our catechesis today. But before I go on, I will like to specially greet all the youths present here to listen to me. With your presence in the Church you remind all of us that the faith will continue from one generation to the next. The Church remains a mother who continue to give birth to children, nurture them through the sacraments, and help her sons and daughters on their pilgrimage to heaven. I salute all the youths, and through you I greet all the youths all over the world. My esteem greetings to Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, priests, consecrated men and women, and every faithful who is present here today.

My heart is filled with joy to see so many youths from all of the world gathered in Panama to celebrate the gift of God to us. Each one of us is a gift from God to humanity. The Holy Father like his predecessors has been emphasising the need for youths to know that God is in love with them. The Youths are the future of any society. Any society that ignores the aspirations, needs, desires, and spiritual welfare of her youths is preparing for its own funeral. The Catholic Church does not want her own funeral, that is why we give the Youths top priority. You, the Youths, are the only ones that we celebrate World Youth Day for. Every three or

two years since 1985 when Saint John Paul II started it, World Youth Day has always been celebrated. We want the faith to continue and we want the message of salvation to continue. The care for the Youth is at the heart of the mission of the Church.

**2. LET IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD:** The Church has provided us with the scriptural text to reflect upon, “Let it be done to me according to your word.” These words are part of the broad theme for the World Youth Day (WYD) 2019, **“I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Lk 1:38)**. Any catechesis on “Let it be done to me according to your word,” must therefore recognise the inseparable connection between the first declaration of Mary, “I am the servant of the Lord.” Some translation will say, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Mary recognises her identity, as the handmaid of the Lord. It is only after knowing our identity that we are fully able to act according to the word of God.

We are creatures of God, created for particular purpose. In the catholic doctrine, we state that God made us to know him, to serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in heaven. To know God is to be in love with God. God is in love with us. As Youths you must always remember that God made you to be happy with him in this life and forever in heaven. Growth in the knowledge of God leads to increase in the love of God. Once you are in love with God, you will want to do only what pleases God. You will want to think only about God. You will want to share the source of your happiness with others.

The theme for the 34th World Youth Day, 2019 is, **“I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word.” (Lk 1:38)** Pope Francis speaking to Youths at the Closing Mass of World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow Poland, told the Youths that they should imitate Mary. The Pope said and I quote: “She tells us to do what she did: not to squander the gift you have received, but to treasure it in your heart so it can grow and bear fruit, with the help of the Holy Spirit.” This explanation of Pope Francis points to the fact that we can bear fruits when we learn to contemplate the word of God.

In the Gospel of Luke 1:38, the Blessed Virgin Mary’s responds to the invitation of God to accept the role as the mother of the saviour of the world. In this few words of Mary recorded in the Gospel of Luke we come to understand Mary’s total dependence on God. Let it be done to me according to your word. This is total submission to the Will of God. This is the realization of the limitation of human will. The limitation of human ingenuity. No matter how good what we humans create, it is still limited.

**3. YOUTHS AVAILABILITY TO GOD:** In these words of Mary, let it be done to be according to your word, we discover that Mary is affirming her availability for God’s work. It is like Mary saying, here am I, ready to act according to your word. “Here am I,” is a statement of availability. Mary is available to God. She is ready to accept whatever the future has to offer as long as she is with God. Our dear Youths, you all must say with Mary, “here am I”. You must make yourself available for God to use you to act according to his word. In order to respond like Mary, we must

know who we are and who is speaking to us. We must know the “Word” in order to act according to the direction of the Word.

The use of the word “Here” points to the fact that as adopted sons and daughters of God, we live in the here and now of God. God speaks to us in the present situation. Sometimes you may read the Bible and think that God is the powerful God of the past. The God who could lead the minority Israelites out of Egypt without an organized military formation; God who invited Mary to embrace the vocation of being the mother of God is the same One inviting you our dear Youths. God does not force His Will upon us. He speaks to us gently. God wants us to move away from addictions to many things that take us away from his presence. Many things entice the Youths and make it difficult for our Youths to answer ‘Here Am I’.

I encourage the Youths of today, to embrace God’s invitation to you to be Holy. Do not be afraid to be Holy. Holiness is possible for people of every age. Holiness comes from accepting the will of God. It is always an invitation that requires immediate response. You cannot postpone your response. It has to be ‘Here am I’. It is a vocation that can only be answered in the present tense. You do not answer God’s invitation by saying; ‘I will be there’. No, you answer God’s invitation by saying ‘Here am I’. ‘Lord am here for you right now’. Mary recognises that it is only when we allow the Will of God to be done in our lives can we find true happiness.

**4. THE NECESSITY FOR THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION:** We have been discussing what it means to say with Mary; Let it be done to me according to your word. We are beloved creatures of God, made in his

own image, and bequeathed with divine dignity that cannot be effaced even by sin. Sometimes we may not have acted according to the word of God. We may have failed several times. Sometimes we may feel that we cannot ever act according to the word of God. We may have been convinced that some of the commandments of God are beyond us to observe. We may have completely given in to the maxim of the word that breads and promote selfishness. Selfishness that maybe seen in our abuse of material resources, disordered sexual life, addiction to drugs, and any other life style that becloud our human dignity given to us by God.

We have listened to homilies and various catechesis for more than two days now. We heard the beautiful words of encouragement of Pope Francis yesterday evening. In the past, Pope Francis have always been emphasising God's mercy towards us, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. God, he says, is never tired of forgiving us. We must never be tired of asking him for forgiveness. **There is no Divine Fatigue in Forgiveness. It is in the nature of God to forgive.**

I invite you to reflect on your life and identify areas where you have fallen short of acting according to the word of God like Mary always did. Whenever we sin, we miss our direction. Confession or the sacrament of reconciliation is the process of resetting or rediscovering our direction to God. As youths you are very familiar with the technological tool, the Global Positioning System, popularly known as GPS. The GPS helps us to arrive at our destination. It is very useful to many of us. But it is useless if you do not know the address of where you are going to. You must enter the address or the postal code into the GPS for it to lead you to your destination. You may not know the direction that leads to the place, just

trust that once you know the destination, the GPS will take you there. At times when you fail to follow the road indicated by the GPS, the GPS says, recalibrating. It will re-configure itself and lead you back to the direction of your destination. The sacrament of confession my dear youths, is like a spiritual GPS. In life we sometimes miss our direction to our destination. When we examine our consciences properly and make a good confession, we are recalibrated to focus on the right direction once again. Today, we have the opportunity to recalibrate our direction.

Many youths do ask me these questions during my pastoral visitations to parishes. I will like to share these questions and some of the answers I sometimes give in response: **Why do I have to go to confession when I am almost sure of committing the same sin again. Is it not an abuse of the sacrament? Will I not be more respectful of the sacrament if I just stay away from it knowing that there is pretty much a great chance that I will commit the sin again?** Well, I always use this example to answer these questions: I ask them, when you wash your cloths, are you not pretty sure that it will get dirty again? Who stops doing laundry because their cloths will get dirty again? We never consider the time spent doing laundry as waste of time. We know that no matter how many times we wash our cloths, they will be dirty again. Yet, we keep washing them whenever they are dirty. It is because we know that the alternative is terrible. Imagine not washing your cloths and you keep using them. You will have serious skin infection that can even be fatal. In a similar way, the sacrament of confession is laundry for the soul. If we are not tired washing material cloths that fades away, how much more the soul that is immortal. If a person abandons the sacrament of confession the person gradually begins to loss the sense of sin, the guilt that goes with sin. Guilt is to lead us to

conversion of heart. Conversion helps us to rediscover our direction to our destination.

We are all invited to think about the journey of our lives. Where are we heading towards? Where have I been going? Where am I at this present moment? We must never let our past failures discourage us from trying. St. Teresa of Calcutta has this saying: “God has not called us to be successful, but God has called us to be faithful.” To be faithful is to say and act like Mary, let it be done to be according to your word. This period should be used to discern the Will of God in our lives. God’s invitation to us to love must be shown in the choices we make. Love must permeate everything we do or say. I therefore, invite you to make good use of the sacrament of reconciliation in the church or in the Parque del Perdón, and possibly to visit the Vocations Centre.

**5. CONCLUSION:** As I conclude this reflection, let me remind you that holiness of life is much easier if you allow Mary to lead you. Mary wants to teach you how to love her Son. She wants to teach you how to follow her Son. She wants to teach you how to reject sin and be happy. Too often, we accept the idea that to be holy is to be boring. I come here to tell you today, that, you can have fun and still be holy. Holiness is fun. Holiness is not boring. Everyone who genuinely seek authentic life lives a holy life. Whenever you learn to choose what pleases God, it is then you can truly say you are having fun. Every enjoyment that exclude Christ cannot be a true enjoyment. Remember, the words of St. Augustine: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.” My dear beloved Youths, you will find no rest, nor happiness in money, sex, popularity, or fame. It is only in God that you will find rest.

You have been made for God and God is the source of your true rest and it is only in God that you can have true fun. Therefore, with Mary, continue to enjoy the favour that comes from God; a favour that brings peace and calmness to us. Continue to enjoy the favour of God that only comes when we learn to say like Mary; Let it be done to me according to your word.