

**ARCHBISHOP AUGUSTINE OBIORA AKUBEZE HOMILY AT THE
CATHEDRATICUM OF ABUDU DEANERY 2 APRIL 2019 AT ST. THOMAS
AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH ABUDU**

THEME: CHRIST IS THE WATER OF LIFE

1. PROTOCOL/ INTRODUCTION: Very Rev. Fr. Benjamin Brodricks, the Dean of Abudu Deanery, Very Rev Fr. Augustine Ehigie, my Vicar General, Very Rev Fr. Michael Oyanoafoh, my Chancellor, My Episcopal Vicars, members of the Curia, Very Rev Frs., and Rev Frs., Consecrated men and women, and the faithful of Abudu Deanery, I greet all of you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful One who has come to redeem us and show us the face of the Father. God assures in today's liturgy, that he is capable of transforming our lives through the living water that flows from the temple. Christ himself is the temple that produces this water that transforms our lives. No matter what our past have been we can begin again. We like to us use this opportunity to briefly speak on the issue of healing ministry in the Church and the obligation that falls upon us to seek God's healing through the sacraments and through medical care.

2. GRATITUDE TO GOD AND APPRECIATION: We will like to first of all acknowledge God's abundant blessings upon us since we met here last year. Since then a few developments have taken place in the Archdiocese. We owe God the gratitude for these developments. Since our last celebration, we have established the Committee for the proposed diocese of Iguobazuwa. We have presented our request for the proposed diocese of Iguobazuwa to the priests and laity of the Archdiocese; to the Provincial Bishops and Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, who have all given the necessary approval for the next stage of action. The next step is the transmission of the request to the Holy Father who

through the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples will consider the request. Let us pray for a favourable response. We were able to make this request because of your desire to further the work of evangelization in our Archdiocese. The creation of a diocese leads to fast growth and spread of the Gospel message. The experiences of Auchi and Uromi dioceses clearly bear testimony to this fact. The creation of Iguobazuwa diocese will definitely lead to the spread of the Gospel message in this area.

We will like to use this opportunity to thank those who have been working in the Committee for the proposed diocese. Thank you for the sacrifices you are making for the work of God. The work of the Committee continues until the eventual creation of the diocese. The various sub-committees must meet regularly and make your submissions to the General body of the Committee who is to submit your reports to me for discussion and consultation with the relevant organs of administration in the Archdiocese. We therefore, as a matter of urgency, appeal to all the members of the Committee to work hard for the realization of this project.

3. HEALING MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH: As we gather together today, we like to use this opportunity address some matters that relate to seeking healing of the body through prayers and medicine. There have been occasions where some persons after being ministered to by priests or other members of the faithful decide not to seek medical care. Let us use this opportunity to address the issue of healing ministry in the Church. The Catholic Church has the Sacrament of Confession and Anointing of the Sick as sacraments that effect healing. Confession effects spiritual healing and Anointing of the Sick brings both spiritual healing and physical healing. There is no doubt that there are numerous

miracles that many faithful can testify to regarding the effects of these sacramental healing.

However, it must be stated that seeking divine intervention for healing and receiving medical treatment are not exclusive. It is therefore, wrong for anyone who is sick to be content with receiving the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick without seeking medical care. It is wrong to receive the prayers and blessings of a priest and not seek medical attention. All priests must admonish the sick person to seek proper medical care. The medical care provided through hospitals and clinics are part of God's plan for the healing of the sick. The ritual for blessing of hospitals underscores this when it states: “

By the grace of your Holy Spirit make this place a house of blessing and a center of love, where physicians practice the art of healing wisely, where nurses and aides serve the sick with care, where the faithful come to visit Christ in the person of their brothers and sisters. Grant that, comforted in their illness, the patients will quickly regain their health and joyfully thank you for the favours they have received.

You will notice that the ritual calls the art of the physicians, an art of healing and then concluded that those who are healed through medical intervention need to joyfully thank God. It is because the healing that comes through medical surgery, taking of prescribed drugs, observing the daily medication prescribed by doctors, are all healings that come from God. It is therefore, sinful, and evil to stop receiving medical care in the name of having received divine healing from God. The hospital is an extension of the healing ministry of Christ. We priests are ordained to

sanctify the faithful through the sacraments and sacramentals; to teach them the doctrine of the Church and to govern them according to the provisions of the laws of the Church. We therefore, state that no priest should in the name of being the minister of healing admonish or validate any notion that encourages people from seeking medical care. If any faithful are told by any priest that after prayer you should not go to the hospital please do not obey such priest. If any priest asked you to stop taking your medication after prayer, please do not obey such unlawful directive. Only your medical doctors should prescribe drugs for you and he or she is the competent person to tell you when to stop your medication.

St John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio, Dolentium Hominium*, Establishing the Pontifical Commission for the Apostolate of the Health Care Workers, in 1985, noted:

In fact, over the course of the centuries the Church has felt strongly that service to the sick and suffering is an integral part of her mission, and not only has she encouraged among Christians the blossoming of various works of mercy, but she has also established many religious institutions within her with the specific aim to fostering, organizing, improving and increasing help to the sick Missionaries, on their part, in carrying out the work of evangelization have constantly combined the preaching of the Good News with the help and care of the sick.

This magisterial teaching of the Holy Father clearly points to the fact that establishment of hospitals and clinics are part of the mission of the

Church. Christ who granted the Church the mandate to go out and proclaim the God News also granted her the power to heal the sick. Healing of the sick and the proclamation of the Gospel are inseparable.

4. THE FIRST READING (EZEKIEL 47:1-9, 12): In this reading, Ezekiel who was one of the exilic prophets recounts a special vision. He says God brought him back to the temple and he saw water that was flowing from the temple. Wherever this water goes it brought life. Stagnate water was transformed; salty water was transformed and trees and fruits produced food for the people. This vision is quite telling. First, that it happened in the land of exile shows that God can reach us anywhere we are. We can never be outside the reach of God. Secondly, that water which brings life can flow from a destroyed temple, shows that no matter how terrible our situation may be God can still intervene. This was a message of hope for the people of Israel in exile.

Sin is the greatest form of exile that we suffer from today. Every sinner is in exile. The story of the prodigal son reveals this clearly. The son went to a distant country. Anytime we move away from God we are in a distant country. The Israelites suffered in exile because they disobeyed God. When we sin we go into exile and we experience suffering too. This Lenten Season offers us the opportunity to return back to God. It offers us the opportunity to allow the living waters flowing from the temple reach us. Christ is the new temple. Through the paschal mystery, that is, through his passion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven he has obtained for us the salvific mystery of God.

We therefore, invite you to make use of the sacrament of reconciliation so that you can revitalize your life. Through the worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist the stagnate aspect of your life will be transformed. Open yourselves up for God to work his wonders in your life. Do not be afraid to approach him in the Sacraments. Do not give up hope for a better

future. Do not allow your past failures to dictate your future. Do not allow your mistakes to define you. Ezekiel tells us that the water flows even from a destroyed temple. Your plans may have been destroyed. But let me tell you today, that the living water, Christ Jesus himself will restore your life back to you. Your children's plan may have been shattered because of mistakes in the past. The living water of Christ will reach them and transform their lives. Yes, have faith, have hope in God. We trust in the Lord of host who is with us. The Lord is our stronghold as the Psalmist tells us today. Make God your strong hold. Do not make any human being your strong hold. Seek refuge in God.

5. THE GOSPEL READING (JOHN 5:1-16): Do you want to be healed? This was the question Jesus posed to the man who had been lying ill for 38 years. The response of the sick man to Jesus was: "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled and while I am going another steps down before me." This man had always desired to be healed but he had no one to help him. The insensitivity of people around him did not discourage this man. The fact that he had tried several times and failed did not discourage this man. This man represents all those who have experienced failures several times. This man represents all those who have experienced rejection and abandonment. Rejection from family members, from members of your church or your place of work. To all those who have failed several times, I tell you, do not give up. Never stop trying. It was after thirty-eight years this man achieved success. This man has been coming to the same place even before Christ was born.

Jesus said to the man, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." Beyond the physical healing of this man, there is a spiritual message hidden in this passage. The Father of the Church tells us that the pool represents the waters of baptism. With the transformation of the ritual of purification to

a sacrament by Christ, the waters of baptism is now available not only to those who are stronger and able to enter the pool first. It is available to all who seek Christ in faith and have come to learn more about him.

Catechesis before the reception of Baptism is very important. Priests and Catechists should give priority to the preparation of candidates for this Sacrament. A sound catholic tradition should be built into the candidates. Poor catechesis leads to poor integration into the faith. Priests and Catechists must also be available to help those who are not able to receive Holy Communion because of their marital status. There are some who out of ignorance may not know what to do. There are some who are in irregular union. There are others in peculiar situation that requires canonical interventions either through simple convalidation or radical convalidation or what is called *sanatio in radice*. Evaluate each case and seek the appropriate advice from the Chancery and the Marriage Tribunal or my Judicial Vicar. Assist those without canonical impediments to be admitted to the Sacraments.

6. CONCLUSION: Cathedraticum as you know offers the faithful the opportunity to support me in the governance of the Archdiocese. We are very grateful for the sacrifices you make to ensure that these gifts are presented to me to help needy persons and institutions. Jesus tells us that whoever gives a cup of cold water to his disciples will certainly receive divine reward. It is my prayer that this prayer of Christ will come to fruition in your lives and the lives of your loved ones. I entrust the entire Abudu Deanery to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. May she continue to intercede for you and your families. May God bless his words in our hearts and make them bear fruits through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God bless you all!