

**ARCHBISHOP AUGUSTINE OBIORA AKUBEZE HOMILY AT THE CATHEDRATICUM OF IGUOBAZUWA DEANERY 1 APRIL 2019 AT ST. ANDREW CATHOLIC CHURCH IGUOBAZUWA**

**THEME: THE END TO OUR WEeping**

**1. PROTOCOL/ INTRODUCTION:** Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Felix Igbineweka, the Dean of Iguobazuwa 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 Iguobazuwa 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 us in today's liturgy, that he has come to wipe away our tears. He has come to bring meaning and security to our lives. He has come to bring both spiritual and physical healing to us.

**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.

**3.1 THE FIRST READING ISAIAH 65:17-21:** The Lord through the Prophet Isaiah in the First Reading of today promised to create a new heaven and a new earth. God invites the people to rejoice and be glad. The reason for such joy and gladness is given by God himself. God says; “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall there be the sound of weeping or cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days.” God goes on to promise them that they will be able to build houses and live in them.

These divine promises are very much appropriate for us in Nigeria at this time. We all need a new Nigeria where election is not like a declaration of war. Where votes of the people count. We need a new Nigeria where infants die from preventable diseases. Nearly ten per cent of new-born deaths in the world last year occurred in Nigeria, a new report by the United Nations Children Fund, UNICEF, has revealed. Nigeria is about 2

percent of the world population but we account for ten percent of children who die before they reach their tenth birthday. Surely, the Word of God through the Prophet Isaiah speaks to us. It brings hope to us. It is also a message that calls for conversion of hearts. Those who are responsible for poor health care facilities should take responsibility for creating this terrible situation. There has been too much tears from mothers who lost their children because of poor medical treatments. There have been too much tears from the eyes of husbands who have lost their wives in the process of given birth. There have been too much tears in the eyes of children who have lost their mothers in the process of giving birth. There have been too much tears in the eyes of parents who lost their children to malaria, typhoid, cancer etc. There has been too much weeping in our land.

**3.2 HEALING MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH:** 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 GOSPEL READING (GOSPEL READING: JOHN 4:43-54):**

Jesus tells the unnamed official whose son was ill in Capernaum, Go, your son will live. The man came to Jesus to appeal to him to come to his house to heal him before he dies. The man believed the words of Christ, and instantly the son was healed. Jesus reveals us through this passage

that his power to heal is not limited to space and time. Jesus reproached those who seek him only for the purposes of miracles or to seek signs and wonders. The man who came to intercede for his son believed the words of Jesus without seeing any signs and wonders. The faith of this man in Jesus resulted in the healing of the sick son.

Intercessory prayers are very vital in the life of a Christian. Very often people ask us to pray for them. Sometimes we remember to pray for them and at other times we completely forget. We must take every request to pray for a person seriously. We must take the intention of such persons to Christ, at the Eucharistic celebration, at visitation to the Blessed Sacrament, and through the hands of our Blessed Virgin Mary to Christ.

Some of our Catholic faithful are confronted with the question of why do you pray to Mary; why do you invoke the saints to pray for you, when you could as well go straight to Christ? The action of the man in the Gospel we have just read points to the potency of intercession of intermediary between us and Christ. The sick son did not approach Christ for healing. The son probably did not even know Christ, yet he was a beneficiary of Christ divine healing. This shows that we can benefit from the prayerful intercession of others with Christ. When we invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we are simply asking her to do what this man did for his son; that is, ask Christ to come to the aid of the son. When we ask for the intercession of the saints, we are simply asking them to do what this man did for his son. If human beings on earth can intercede for us, it is even more assuring to know that those in heaven will be able to intercede for us better. Therefore, devotion that promotes the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints for help are proper Catholic devotions that every faithful should embrace.

**5. CONCLUSION:** Dearly beloved in Christ, as we gather today to celebrate this Eucharist that express our communion with Christ and with one another, I want to urge you to continue to work for the unity of the Church. The Church has all the means for our salvation. There is no need to seek help outside the Church. God has assured us of bringing an end to our tears. God has assured of us of living in peace and tranquillity. We know that we are yet to realise this in our society. But let each one of us continue to work for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. We do this by taking our ecclesiastical duties and civil responsibilities seriously.

In conclusion, I will like to thank the Dean of Iguobazuwa, the priests, and the entire faithful for your contribution to evangelization. Some of you are working in very challenging situations. May God reward you abundantly for all you are doing for the Church. Never get tired of doing what is good. I want to thank you for all the assistance you provide for me to be able to help others in the work of evangelization. I am very much aware that you make lots of sacrifices to bring the money and other items you present to me yearly. I appreciate all that you have been doing. I entrust you and your families to our Blessed Mother for her intercession. May God continue to favour you and your family through divine protection, divine healing, and divine peace. May God bless his words in our hearts and make they bear fruits through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God bless you all!