

**ARCHBISHOP AUGUSTINE OBIORA AKUBEZE HOMILY AT THE FOURTH
NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS WEDNESDAY 23RD OCTOBER 2019 AT
ST PAUL CATHOLIC CHURCH BENIN CITY**

**THEME: GO INTO THE WORLD AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE
WHOLE CREATION (MARK 16:15)**

1. PROTOCOL: Your Eminence, John Cardinal Onayekan, Your Excellencies, Very Rev Monsignori, Very Rev Frs., and Rev Frs., Consecrated persons, Catechists, lay faithful, invited guests, Government officials, traditional leaders, security personnel, members of the press, the Chairman of the LOC and his team, the National PMS Director, all Diocesan PMS Directors, Delegates from all the dioceses in Nigeria, members of CSN, and everyone present here, I greet you and welcome you to Benin City.

2. INTRODUCTION: Jesus told his disciples to go into the whole world and preach the gospel. This was a commandment that Christ gave to his disciples. It was not a suggestion. It was not an exhortation. It was a directive. Preaching of the Gospel is compulsory for every Christians. Commandments are to be obeyed. But in order to carry out this directive or instruction, we have to know what we are going out to preach. The content of the Gospel must be well understood by the preacher. The Gospel must have permeated the life of the preacher before going out to preach. You cannot tell people about the good news if you are not familiar with the Good news.

We are therefore to take the first step in compliance to the instruction to preach by studying the content of what we are to preach. For us Catholic

the doctrine, the creed, the content of the good news is to be found in the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. This deposit of the faith which remain constant but with frequent growth insight is explained to us by the magisterium of the Church. We must develop the culture of listening to the magisterium of the Church if we want to be good preachers of the gospel. The deposit of the faith has been entrusted to the Church to be explained to the entire world.

3. THE CHURCH ON MISSION: The Church is always on a mission. This is explaining the reason why everyone is a missionary by virtue of our baptism. Once we are baptised, we become missionary. Although, some consecrated institutes are called missionary societies, because their entire work is dedicated to the mission, it is nonetheless true that we the baptised are missionaries. The Church is the mystical body of Christ. Christ is the head, the Pope and the Bishops in union with him are the Vicars of Christ who constitute the College of Bishops to whom the function of preserving, protecting, and promoting the Gospel message is principally entrusted to.

The constitutive reality of the Church unfolds in her preaching the gospel of conversion to everyone in the world. This Gospel must be heard in schools, market places, work places, on our streets, in the family, and in our churches. The proclamation of the Gospel entails a call to conversion of hearts. We the agents of the mission must first be truly converted so that we do not constitute obstacles to the message we are going to be preaching.

How do you preach the Gospel of Christ in your office when you are involved in collecting greasing the engine of the corrupt institution? To take bribe like every other person. How do you preach the Gospel message to others when you are

a tribal and ethnic bigot? How will people listen to you when you preach Christ who died for our sins and yet you promote prejudice against people of another ethnic group? How will the people listen to you when you hang the rosary on your neck and yet you are engaged in extramarital affairs? How will people listen to the Gospel of Christ when you the preacher are the organizer of examination malpractice? How will the people listen to the Gospel of Christ that you are preaching when you fill vacant positions in your departments with only people who speak the same language with you? How will you preach the Gospel of Christ when as a religious congregation you admit only people from your village? How will people listen to you when you preach Christ who has brought Universal salvation to everyone when you vote people to lead you on basis on ethnic sentiments and not on merit? How do you preach the message of Christ who loves everyone when you reject Church leaders appointed by legitimate authority because they are not from the section of people you expected them to be chosen from? How do you preach the Gospel of Christ to others when in the Church you condemn approved lay apostolate groups? How do you preach the Gospel of Christ that is to unity humanity when we are visible agents of divisions in our communities? We must have serious introspection and conversion of hearts if we want to become effective agents of the mission.

4. THE READINGS (FIRST READING ISAIAH 2:1-5; SECOND READING ROMANS 10:9-18; GOSPEL READING: MATHEW 28:16-20): In the First reading we are told that the mountain of the Lord, that is, the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of all mountains. It shall

attract people from every nation. In this house of the Lord, differences on the basis of race, language, social status, clerical and laity shall collapse. All those who claim this mountain has one aim, which is to learn the ways of the Lord, so that we can walk in his path. When human beings have accepted to walk in the ways of the Lord, there will be an end to enmity that exists among them. Then the sword, the weapon of destruction shall be built into the weapon of agriculture. We live in a world that spends more money piling up arms for war. Most wealthy nations spend more money on research of how to get more sophisticated weapon than they spend of research on how to end diseases and poverty. One of the tasks we have as missionaries is to speak to this world. We must begin from our various societies in the Church. We must improve on our welfare for the members of the societies we belong to. From the way we treat and care for ourselves more people will come to appreciate the Gospel of Christ. When the message of Christ is truly accepted there will not be war any more. No more war between husband and wife; between father and daughter; between daughter and mother-in-law; no more war between tribes; no more war between East and West, South and North. The message of Christ unites and brings peace. This is why we all must work hard at ensuring that more people hear the Gospel of Christ.

In the Second Reading (Romans 10:9-18), St Paul tells us that believing in Christ brings salvation because it leads to a radical transformation of a person's world view. Faith in Christ breaks down the walls of divisions between nations. The author of the reading then goes on to ask; how can they believe in Christ if they have never heard of him? We are to make the people hear of Christ so that they can believe in him and have salvation. Everyone who is ready to be a missionary, has beautiful feet. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news? Our feet will

never get tired as long as we want to walk the long journey of taking the good news to those who have not heard.

We support the mission through personal participation by going on mission ourselves. We Catholics must work out method of using the social media effectively to reach out to those who have not heard the word of God. We must use it to correct those who have always been hearing of the distorted word of God. We must use every legitimate means to spread the Gospel of Christ. In addition to the social media, house to house evangelization should be deplored with all the civility that is required. We should develop a good template for house to house evangelization. The feet of those who carry out such works are always beautiful.

We must walk with our feet to our Catholic Schools to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Parish schools must be effective means of evangelization. These schools must first and primarily be seen from the perspective of evangelization. We must resist the temptation of using the schools as sources of income alone. While it is true that Catholic schools can generate income for the Church, we must not forget that we into education for the purpose of evangelization. Catechesis and doctrine must be mandated in our schools. Dioceses should ensure that their education policies make good provisions for sound doctrinal formation of the pupils and students.

The work of the mission requires us to teach the people everything Christ has commanded us to teach. We are not to invent our own message. We are not to establish new methods of making people disciples of Christ. Altar calls whether in the Catholic Church or outside the Church do not constitute valid ways of becoming a disciple of Christ. Only through valid baptism can a person become a disciple of Christ. Catechumens become

disciples through baptism by desire. Recounting a few lines of the scripture and declaring a person as born again does not constitute valid means of becoming a disciple of Christ or a Christian. Christ himself stated it clearly in the Gospel we just read. Baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We therefore call on all groups in the Church to ensure that they bring unbaptised and uncatechised person to the priests and catechists for preparation for the sacraments. The sacraments are not our personal property, we are only custodians. Those who have the requisite knowledge should be allowed to receive the sacraments.

5. CONCLUSION: Dearly beloved in Christ, I once again welcome you to Benin City for this National Mission Congress. As we celebrate it in the month of October declared by Pope Francis as extraordinary mission month, we recall with joy the fact that two Nigerians are among the twenty-five figures and heroes of the faith selected to guide us. Blessed Tansi and Vivian Ogun from Benin were chosen. Many of us have heard of Blessed Tansi but only a few may have heard of Vivian Ogun. The Holy See have heard of her heroic life and have acknowledged her as a figure of saintly life for the mission. We have begun the first phase in the process of beatification. In the coming days you will be hearing more of her holiness of life. How she preached the Gospel of Christ and even gave her life for it. She is indeed a true reflection of St Maria Goretti.

Let us entrust our lives and works into the hands of Our Lady the Queen of the mission. May she assist us as we go out to preach the Gospel to everyone in the world. May she protect us with her motherly mantle. May our mother Mary intercede for you and your families. May God bless his words in our hearts and make them bear fruits in our lives through Christ our Lord. Amen.

DECLARATION OF THE FOURTH NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS OPEN:

As the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria and by the authority which I enjoy with my communion with the See of Peter the Head of the College of Bishops, I declare this Fourth National Mission Congress Open. I pray that God will bless everyone who will participate in this Congress. We impart our Episcopal Blessings with all the full indulgences that goes with participation in this kind of Congress upon all of you. May God bless all of you.