

**ARCHBISHOP AUGUSTINE OBIORA AKUBEZE HOMILY AT THE  
COMMISSIONING OF NEW LECTORS FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BENIN  
CITY AT ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH ON SUNDAY 6 OCTOBER, 2019**

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ARCHBISHOP OF BENIN CITY**

**THEME: FAITH IS STRENGTHENED BY GOD'S WORD**

**1. PROTOCOL:** Very Rev. Fr. David Ogun, the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Sixtus Alaegbu, Chaplain of the Archdiocesan Board of Lectors, other Priests here present, Consecrated Persons, Prof. Okungbowa, President of the Archdiocesan Board of Lectors, all lectors present today for the commissioning, Invited Guests and the lay faithful of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Glory be to Jesus. Honour to Mary.

**2. GREETINGS:** I greet all of you who are here today. The church celebrates the twenty seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of the Liturgical Year C and during this Mass I shall commission New Lectors for the Archdiocese of Benin City from various Parishes. I Greet Prof. Mrs. Okungbowa, your President and other officers of your Board. I thank you for inviting me to this Mass and for the honor to preside over this ceremony. Occasions like this afford us an opportunity to thank God and to build our faith. It helps to re-ignite our zeal to work for God and the church. Our role in the church as Lectors is a very important one which calls us to be ever closer to God.

**3. THE WORD OF GOD IS POWER:** The word of God is a very powerful tool. The word of God tells us in Isaiah 55:11 that the word that goes forth from the mouth of the prophet will not return void. It will not return empty without carrying out all that God wants it to. The word of God holds a

pivotal place in the Church. The Word of God increases the faith of the people. The word of God heals us. The word of God guides us. The word of God teaches us. The word of God reproves us. Sometimes the word of God can be difficult and challenging. At other times it can be sweet. Whatever way we see it. God's word has power. Have you ever wondered why the Liturgy of the word is a very important aspect of the Mass or why we stand to listen to the Gospel at Mass? It is because the "word" is not only of the Lord, it is God himself. Indeed, John was right: "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1). Pope Francis has declared the third Sunday in ordinary time as the Sunday of the word of God. In an Apostolic letter, issued *motu proprio* last week and titled "Aperuit Illis": Instituting the Sunday of the word of God, the Pope says and I quote: **"Consequently, I hereby declare that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God. This *Sunday of the Word of God* will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity. This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the *Sunday of the Word of God* has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out, for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity.**

This explains the reason why readers of the Word go through rigorous sessions of training to get themselves ready for the daily proclamation of the Word. This is also the very reason we are called to be attentive when it is proclaimed and to put it into practice in our daily lives. When the word is proclaimed it is God who speaks directly to the people, offering them his Spiritual support and the needed guidance for the difficult journey of life. It

therefore becomes mandatory that no one should distort the word proclaimed in the church.

Proclaimers of the word must be well chosen and well prepared for this very important function in the church. The ministry of Lector is one of the steps taken by candidates preparing for priestly Ordination. Today, the lay faithful also play this role but are not instituted like the candidates for ordination but are instead commissioned. As lay Lectors, you will be entrusted with proclaiming the word of God to your brothers and sisters. You will be invited to an even deeper contemplation of that saving Word, so that you might know Him and be able to offer to others the One whom you know as your Lord. Lectors should read clearly. They should not be people who muddle their words that no one is able to understand what they read. I want to believe that all who are to be commissioned today have gone through the compulsory period of training and have been ascertained fit to proclaim the word of God in the church.

I congratulate all of you today as you take up this task. Always be ready to proclaim the word of God at all masses whether your name is on the roaster or not. Make use of the sacrament of confession as soon as you become conscious of any sin. It is important to be in a state of Grace to proclaim the word of God. Be open to the spirit of God who enlightens us every time we read and meditate on God's word. Believe what you read and practice what you believe. Any atheist can read the God's word to a crowd of people. It takes no great skill or intelligence. But to do so with faith, that is the challenge. Delve deeply into the fathomless riches of the Word of God, so that you can communicate to others the intense love that God has for them.

And immerse yourselves too in the love of God incarnate in the holy Eucharist. May God bless you as you bring him to others. Amen.

**4. THE READINGS:** Today's readings tell us that we need Faith to understand God and his works. It tells us further too that Faith helps us believe in the impossible and that with our gift of faith intact we will always be happy and trust God in all things.

The **First Reading** us from the Book of the Prophet Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4. The Prophet spoke at a time when the Babylonian army was marching to conquer the Israelites. It was spoken to keep up the spirits of the Jews. The King did nothing to protect the weak and the poor and allowed them to be oppressed. The people went to the Prophet in despair and asked him to consult the Lord for them. The Prophet asks the Lord why he has remained silent and allows the oppression of the people. He asks the Lord why he has refused to listen to their cry for help. He asks the Lord why he has allowed the wicked to triumph? They are the same questions we ask God today.

Why is it that I pray and nothing happens? Why is it that I work hard every day and yet I am not appreciated? Why is it that this sickness has refused to go? Why is that I have been looking for a job for many years now and am yet to get employed? Why is it that those who cheat prosper and I who have remained faithful wallow in abject poverty? Why is there so much killings and injustice? Why is there so much evil in a good world? Why has God abandoned us?

God responds to the Prophets complaints. He tells the prophet to be patient: "if it comes slowly wait, for come it will, without fail...the upright man will live by his faithfulness". My dear people of God, God's time is always the best. God never abandons us. There is time for everything. When

it is His time to act he will act. Those who live by faith will triumph at the end. You must be patient and trust in God. He knows what you are passing through. He knows that you are being oppressed. He knows that you are experiencing family problems. He knows you need money for your school fees. He knows you need that job. He knows you are on the brink of collapse. Just a little time more, He will act. Do not get dismayed, keep your hopes alive. God never fails.

In the **Second Reading** from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14. Paul tells Timothy never to be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord; for the spirit he received is not one of timidity but of power. Some Catholics today are still ashamed of professing their faith. It is so bad that they do not even want to be called Catholics in public. Jesus says, if you are ashamed of me before men, I will also be ashamed of you before my Father in heaven. You are ashamed of your faith when you keep quiet in the face of obvious injustice. You are ashamed of your faith when you cannot beat them and you join them. You are ashamed of your faith when you do not denounce those who steal public money. You are ashamed of your faith when you see a widow or an orphan and you do nothing to help. You are ashamed of your faith when you cannot stand up for the truth, so that you are not considered a weakling. Today, the Psalmist acclaim, if you hear the word of God, harden not your heart. Fan into flame the spirit you received at baptism and confirmation. Be proud to be a child of God. Be bold to speak against corruption, injustices and ills in your place of work; in your schools, in your playgrounds. God who is your Father will not abandon you.

In the **Gospel Reading** (Luke 17:5-10), the Evangelist Luke tells us about an encounter between Jesus and his disciples. In the first part of the

encounter the disciples asked Jesus to increase their Faith. What do they mean when they made that request? Is Jesus in a position to increase faith? Faith, our penny Catechism tells us, is a supernatural gift of God which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed. Faith is understanding God. Faith is trusting God. Faith is believing that what is impossible can be possible with the help of God. Yes, if you have faith you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea and it will obey you” (Luke 17:5). Faith finds solutions for situations that appear difficult. Faith is total submission to God’s will. You must ask for the gift of faith today; a faith that will enable you trust God above all things; a faith that will enable you love God above all else and your neighbour as yourself; a faith that will make you truly human and to appreciate the wonders of God in your life and that of your family.

In the second part of the encounter Jesus tells the apostles a parable that seems disconcerting. After a long day’s work in the fields under the hot sun, as servant returns home exhausted. His employer instead of inviting him to a meal asks him to serve him first. Jesus is saying something very important to all of us today. There are still Christians who think in terms of merit: “if I do good I shall be rewarded”. They spend their lives earning what they think are points in the bank of the Lord. God, of course, will reward us but it is not a healthy attitude to expect, this is because it is our duty to do good. Doing good is not something that is extraordinary. It is what is expected of us who are servants of God. It is your duty to be good and to do good. We do good because by doing good, and not expecting any merit, we achieve our own happiness and we become like our Father in heaven. Put aside the idea of merit. Let your joy begin now and thank God for the good you do.

**5. CONCLUSION:** In a special way, I wish to thank Rev. Fr. Sixtus Alaegbu, your chaplain, Prof. Mrs. Okungbowa and her team for the wonderful work they are doing in training our brothers and sisters for the task of Reading in the Church. It is not easy but I ask the Lord to continually strengthen and bless you. To our brothers and sisters soon to be commissioned, I thank you for offering yourselves to serve in the Church. I salute your courage and perseverance during the rigours of your training. As you are being commissioned today, I encourage you to bring to bear the fruits of your training in the Liturgical life of our Archdiocese. May the good Lord sustain you with his grace and grant you fruitful service to the Church and humanity. Amen

**May God bless you all!**