

**HOMILY FOR THE DEDICATION OF ASSUMPTION CATHOLIC CHURCH, UTE,  
BENIN CITY ON 9 OCTOBER, 2019**

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**THEME: THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

**1. INTRODUCTION:** My dear people of God, history is being made in our Archdiocese today as we gather for the dedication of this beautiful edifice. I wish to thank you, the good people of Assumption Catholic Church for your faith and perseverance. If a new church is anything, it is a symbol of the faith of its members. This dedication of the church today is part of a religious ritual; it has its beauty and power as you shall see. It is not just another ceremony. We have had a lot of liturgical ceremonies in this church, but in dedicating this church today it will no longer be just another building but Holy ground.

This place will become Calvary where the sacrifice of Christ is celebrated. The sacrifice will become the feast, the altar will become the table, and we feast upon the one who is sacrificed; His body, His blood. Jesus is here and now to be encountered in the sacrifice and in the feast. On behalf of the entire Archdiocese, I congratulate everyone who has been working with God to create this Holy ground; to dig this well, where springs of water will give life to all who drink from it. I thank and congratulate the Parish Priest and his assistant for completing this project. We cannot forget the efforts of Very Rev. Fr. Michael Oyanoafoh and Very Rev. Fr. Dominic Chukwudi who worked tirelessly on this project. May God bless you.

This is truly the work of an entire community and how right it is that we gather in such numbers today. I congratulate all of you, whoever you are, that are members of this parish. You have been absolutely part of the journey and without you this building would not be standing today. I thank also the building committee members, the architect, the workers, and all of you who

donated your time, talent and resources towards the completion of this project. May God bless all of you and replenish your purses a hundred fold through Christ our Lord.

With the dedication of this church today, it will become the House of God and a House of prayer. We know that God is everywhere. Yet when the people of God erect a building and dedicate it totally to God's service, God's glory comes to dwell in that building in such a way that the building can now be called the house of God. As a House of God it becomes a place where we can come to meet with the Lord and pour our hearts to him. It therefore becomes a house of prayer. As the people of God, we will gather to worship in spirit and in truth. We are thus the church and hence we can call this Church, *the people of God*.

At this Mass also 119 of our brothers and sisters shall be enlisted into the army of Christ through the Sacrament of Confirmation. I congratulate them and pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire them to be true ambassadors of God and the church.

**2. GREETINGS:** I greet the Parish Priest and his assistant, Very Rev and Rev. Fathers, Consecrated men and women, the Laity President, the CWO, CMO, and CYON Presidents of the Parish, gentlemen of the press, security personnel. I greet all the invited guests and all the friends of the Parish who have come to rejoice with you on this special day of the Dedication of your Church and I greet all the parishioners of Assumption Catholic Church, Ute. I am very happy to be in your midst today. I am pleased with the work you have done. I applaud all of you and urge that you continue the good work of God.

**3. THE CHURCH IS A FAMILY OF GOD'S PEOPLE:** The church my dear friends is not just a building; it is the body of Christ, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit and it is the people of God. The people make up the church. When a

church is dedicated, the people who make up the church are also consecrated by the same rite. That is why during the sprinkling of water and the Incensation, the people are sprinkled first and incensed before the walls of the church. The church as “a people” was a title given to the nation of Israel by God. The Second Vatican Council Fathers in *Lumen Gentium* chapter two reaffirms this when they called the church the people of God of the new covenant. This is to remind us of our history. A group of people always has a history that defines who they are. We are God’s people and that story is found in his word. We are a people of the book, his book, his narrative. We cannot be detached from it. We are part of God’s story. We are his people. We trace our lineage to Abraham, the Patriarchs, the 12 sons of Jacob, the slaves in Egypt, the wandering nation of Israel, the Kings, the Prophets, and ultimately in the story of Christ and his followers (cf. Galatians 3). Not all are glory filled moments but they are defining moments in our life as the people of God.

To be a people of God means we carry markers. In some cultures people are identified with physical markers like their skin colours, tattoos or a familiar trait. Israel was marked through circumcision. Today, the church is marked through baptism. Our hearts are circumcised. Israel had a covenant of blood by sacrifice, today the Church has the mark of the blood of the lamb. The people of God have the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our markers are invisible to us but will one day be revealed. They define us and set us apart as God’s people, his Church. We receive this definite mark or seal by virtue of our baptism. We become a people of love and of peace; who worship God in spirit and in truth.

To be a people of God also means we are linked, united, held together by common values, beliefs, virtues, commitments and threads of loyalty and faithfulness. We are many persons united as one people. God unifies his people, he brings them together spiritually as one, across time, space, physical,

emotional, mental, racial and national boundary lines. He is at the centre of it all. He identifies his people. He calls them. He names them. He marks them. He disciplines them. He overcomes their differences. He teaches them. He shapes them. He sets them apart. He leads them. He protects them. He provides for them. He gathers them. The church is truly the people of God.

Thus we can see the great gift God has bestowed upon us through his son. Through Christ all — the outsiders, the foreigners, the gentiles — are invited and welcomed into the protection, love, and care of God in the church. We are made his people, a people caught up in his story, a people marked by his promise and faithfulness, a people united by him, through him, with him and in him. What an incredible blessing.

As we dedicate this church today, let us never forget that we are a family of God's people. We are called to co-exist in love. Gather to pray together and to help one another. The church is not a person, it is a people. So do not isolate yourself or cut yourself off from the community of God's people. Let the blessings and graces of God always radiate around you and inspire all that you do as a community.

**4. THE FIRST READING (NEHEMIAH 8):** Our first reading of today taken from the Book of Nehemiah recounts how Ezra the priest read the law to the people after their return from the exile. The temple of God in Jerusalem has just been re-built and dedicated and the first thing the people of God did was to listen to the word of God after the dedication. Then the people wept for their sins. They were reminded that they need not weep anymore because the joy of the Lord is their strength. Our strength lies in God. The God we encounter through the Liturgy of the Word. The God we encounter through the preaching of the priest. The God we encounter through Eucharistic Communion. This is

the source of our strength to overcome every challenge in life. What is it, that is troubling you, is it your husband, wife, children, sickness, employment, seeking future partner, fruit of the womb, etc., remember nothing is beyond the power of God. The Joy of God is your strength. Do not be downcast because God has heard your cry and he will do something for you when you pray to him in this Church.

**5. THE SECOND READING:** Saint Paul in his letter to the Corinthians we just read (1 Cor. 3:9-11, 16-17) says we are God's temple. Our body is the temple of God, therefore, we must ensure that our bodies are used to glorify God. If we sin, we are destroying God's temple. Dearly, beloved in Christ, we must strive to enter the house of God with a pure heart. We must ensure that we worship God in a state of grace. We benefit more from the sacraments when we receive them in a state of grace. It also shows our respect for sacred things and our love for God.

**6. THE GOSPEL READING:** The Evangelist John tells us how Jesus reacted to the house of God being turned into a market place (John 2:13-22). The same way Christ will react today if we turn this Church to a market place, to a place where we make noise, exchange pleasantries without respecting the presence of Christ in the Tabernacle. Take away anything that distracts you from praying in the Church. I will like to mention the use of smart phones. The Church is the house of prayer; it is not a place for you to be receiving calls or making calls or chatting on the various social media. It is true that some smart phones do have apps for prayers but do not use them for any other thing but prayers. Yes, you may be able to say some prayers in your smart phones. But never should you be playing games on your cell phones while in the Church. When you enter the Church you must drop every form of distraction. Let the zeal for God's house consume your hearts.

In the prayer of dedication we implore God to make the Church a holy place. It means after this dedication it will not be a place where we can do just anything. It will no longer be a place to hold committee meetings. It will not be a place where we sell harvest items during bazaar. It will not be a place where we read novels or newspapers or magazines. It will be a holy place; a place of prayer and worship. The altar will be a table of sacrifice of Christ. The altar must be treated with respect and reverence. Only object and items directly connected to the Eucharistic sacrifice can be placed on it. No one is allowed to place other items not directly connected to the Eucharistic sacrifice on it. Even when babies are brought to the Church after baptism, they are not to be placed on the dedicated altar. We must give the church of God the respect due to it.

**7. THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION:** To our dear brothers and sisters who will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation today, I congratulate you. Confirmation is a sacrament of maturity and responsibility that bestows on us the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is a sacrament that makes you ambassadors of the church. Be true ambassadors of the Church that you are called to serve. As soldiers of Christ arm yourselves with the tools of faith, hope and love. Be steadfast in prayer, attend mass daily, love the scriptures and meditate on it day and night, visit the Blessed Sacrament, pray your Rosary, read holy books (lives of saints and other good catholic literatures). Do not disappoint the church. May the Holy Spirit whom you will receive today make you worthy ambassadors of the church through Christ our Lord.

For those of us who have been confirmed, may the grace of the sacraments be renewed in our lives, and may we give to these candidates for confirmation the support of our prayers and good examples.

**9. CONCLUSION:** Once again, I congratulate the Parish Priest, his assistant and the entire faithful of Assumption Catholic Church, for the hard work. Amidst dwindling resources, you ensured that you completed this beautiful Church. We can all see the fruit of your hard work. After the dedication of this Church you must continue to keep it clean. You must develop the culture of maintenance. A beautiful Church like this must not be allowed to become dirty, and ugly as the years run by. A beautiful Church like this must always have people coming in and out to pray. Always create the serene atmosphere that is required and expected of a sacred place. I assure you that whenever you come to this place to pray, God will answer your prayers.

This church bears the beautiful name of Assumption. So our thoughts turn to the Mother of Christ, who broods over this church and this community. So my prayer and the prayer of the whole church here today is that she, who was assumed body and soul into heaven, will never fail to guide this community – this living temple – on the journey into the future; that she herself, bearing her son, will be the light that dispels every darkness from your lives. May this church be an avenue for God to bless you and your families. May this church become a well spring of holiness for all you. May this church bind you together as one and make you prosper in all you do. May the worship offered here, through the intercession of Our Mother assumed into heaven, lead many others to the Life and Truth of Christ, that they may walk always in His Way that leads to Eternal Life. May the grace of God the Father, the love of God the Son and the communion of God the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Congratulations and may God bless you all!