

**ARCHBISHOP AUGUSTINE AKUBEZE HOMILY AT THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF VIVIAN OGU ON  
SATURDAY NOVEMBER 16,2019**

**THEME: A MARTYR IS A MISSIONARY**

**1. GREETINGS:**

I greet my Vicar General, Very Rev. Fr. Augustine Ehigie, the Chancellor, Very Rev, Fr. Michael Oyanoafoh, The deans here present, Very Rev and Rev. Fathers, Consecrated Men and Women, Government Functionaries, Traditional Rulers, Parents, Siblings and Family members of Vivian Ogu, my dear brothers and Sisters in Christ,  
Glory be to Jesus!

**2. INTRODUCTION**

We give praise and glory to God for the life of Vivian Ogu. Today we are gathered around the Lord's table on the very grounds on which she was martyred for the faith Ten Years ago. Today we gather not to mourn but to celebrate her. Her heroic death is no longer a local event but an International one. Vivian has gotten international recognition. She is one of two Nigerians whom the Holy See put forward to be venerated during the ExtraOrdinary Missionary Month just concluded. May the name of God be praised both now and forever.

I want to thank Very Rev. Fr. Stephen Dumbiri and all members of the Pontifical Mission Societies of our Archdiocese for the establishment of the Vivian Ogu movement and for organizing today's event. The Movement was established to pray for the glorification of Vivian Ogu; to promote her story and to build a missionary animation and retreat centre on this very site where she was murdered. I am pleased so far with the way and manner the Movement has gone towards realizing these set objectives. Today's celebration is one of the many events lined up to celebrate the Missionary Year in our Archdiocese. I have no doubts that the efforts being put in by Fr. Dumbiri and his team will see the light of day. We await patiently that day when our own Vivian will be referred to as Saint Vivian Ogu. As we gather to remember her heroic sacrifice, it is my prayer that God will look favorably on our petitions for her canonization and grant all of us who have come here today our heartfelt desires according to His will through Christ our Lord.

**3. A MARTYR IS A WITNESS TO THE MISSION**

We cannot talk about the history of the church without recounting the many of our brothers and Sisters who gave up their lives for their faith. Indeed the blood of martyrs has become the seed of our faith. Martyrdom is a form of evangelization. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that Martyrdom is "the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death" (#2473). Rather than renounce his faith, the martyr bears witness with extraordinary fortitude to the belief that Christ suffered, died, and rose from the dead for our salvation, and to the truths of our Catholic faith. The word martyr itself means "witness." Therefore a martyr is a witness to the mission of Christ and His Church.

Sacred Scripture attests to the courage of men and women who were willing to die as martyrs rather than renounce their faith or be unfaithful to God's law. In the Old Testament, Susanna preferred to die rather than yield to the sinful passions of the two unjust judges (Daniel 13). John the Baptist refused to compromise with evil and never ceased professing the law of God; in the end he "gave his life in witness to truth and justice" St. Stephen, one of the first deacons of the Church, was also the first martyr (Act 6:8ff), followed by the Apostle St. James the Greater (Acts 12:2). The Christian martyrs of the early centuries, too numerous to mention, also gave their lives for the faith. Pope John Paul II

In the Bull of Indiction for the great missionary Year 2000 says and I quote: “martyrdom is the most eloquent proof of the truth of the faith, for faith can give a human face even to the most violent of deaths and show its beauty even in the midst of the most atrocious persecution” According to the Holy Father, this “proof of faith” is evidenced in three ways: First, martyrdom affirms the inviolability of the moral order— both the truth and holiness of God’s law and the dignity of the human person. Second, martyrdom attests to the perfect humanity and true life of the human person: Finally, martyrdom attests to the holiness of the Church, presenting witnesses committed to the truth. In sum, “by their eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendor of moral truth, the martyrs and, in general, all the Church’s saints, light up every period of history by reawakening its moral sense”. (Incarnationis Mysterium, n.13, Veritatis Splendor, n.9)

The death of the followers of Christ as a result of human hostility, especially those who die while engaged in mission work, has an enduring impact on us believers. It enables us to pause and ponder anew the extreme cost of discipleship. It compels us to question whether we measure up to the highest standard of devotion to Christ and his mission for the world. It motivates us to abandon selfish plans and ambitions and turn to serve Christ in both hard and difficult times or places. It brings encouragement and fortitude to all who are Christians. If they can do it we can do it.

We are all missionaries. The church is missionary by nature. As witnesses to Christ, you are called to spread God’s kingdom by dying to yourself and to the world. To be a martyr does not mean you must die physically. There is both physical and spiritual martyrdom. To die for Christ is to die for the Gospel. To be a martyr is to be counter cultural. You cannot remain silent in the face of evil. To do so would mean betraying the mandate entrusted to you by Christ. Vivian did not keep silent but spoke out against the cultural ills of her time. We read in her biography and heard from testimonies how she spoke in favor of purity and virginity. How she organized the little children as President of the Holy Childhood Association of St. Paul Catholic Church to visit orphanages and sing during mass in the children choir. How she began a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew and how on that fateful night she witnessed to her faith when she refused to be defiled but preferred death. Indeed she brought to life the motto of St. Dominic Savio “I will rather die than Sin”. Yes she is the Maria Goretti of our time and like Saint Oscar Romero she did not keep silent in the face of evil but spoke up through her heroic death.

Christians die every day. During the year 2018, according to the report annually edited by Fides News Agency, 40 missionaries were killed in the world, almost double compared to the 23 of 2017, mainly priests. After eight consecutive years in which the highest number of missionaries killed had been recorded in America, in 2018 Africa was the first country in this tragic ranking. From Africa to Latin America, from the Middle to the Far East. Just think of the forced recruitment of child soldiers, young people attracted to the coils of deception; so many families thrown into despair; many productive activities stifled by extortion; so many lives cut short; and a widespread resignation among the populations, almost as if it were an inevitable disaster! As baptized Christians, having received the mandate to announce the liberating Gospel of Christ, we cannot remain silent in the face of so much evil, and as the prophet says: For the sake of my people, I will not keep silent (Isaiah 62:1). You must stand firm convinced of your faith. God is with us. Do not be afraid he will see you through.

Therefore, we must be mindful of the martyrs of our Church, for their witness encourages us and gives us great hope. By the grace of God, may we be as committed to our Lord, His Church, and the faith as they were. Let us take to heart the words of St. Paul, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

#### **4. THE READINGS (Wisdom 4:7-15; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6-10; John 12:23-28):**

The readings of today my dear friends remind us that death is not the end of life. For us Christians, it is the beginning of a new life in Christ. The preface of the mass for the dead tells us that "in death life is changed not ended". The author of the book of wisdom in our first reading helps us realize that there is nothing like unprovided death. No one is too old or young to die. The moment you are born, you are qualified to die. Death does not respect age, profession, title, position, status, tribe or religion. The only thing you are called to do is to be upright and live a righteous life. I hear of people who consider the death of a young person as a curse or bad omen. Some believe that we should have no business with a young person who dies. Some do not believe the young deserve a befitting burial after death or even a remembrance or memorial ceremony. I have even heard some say, we are disturbing the spirit of the dead, "why not let him or her rest in peace?"

My dear people of God the book of Wisdom gives us reasons to celebrate the dead as we celebrate our own Vivian today. Listen to what the reading says: "there was one who pleased God and was loved by him and while living amongst sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul" (wisdom 5:) God has a reason for everything. Everything usually turns for good for those who believe in God. Today we know that the death of Vivian was to bring glory to God and advance his work of mission on earth. Today we know that her death is to make this community known. Today we know that her death was to correct the battered image of Edo State in Europe as a place where girls come from in their number for prostitution. Today we know that good things can come from Edo State and from our country Nigeria. Her death is a testimony that virginity is still possible in our morally degraded society.

In the Second Reading St. Paul admonishes the People of Corinth to always try to please the Lord in order to find favor in Him on the last day. To please the Lord is to do his will and be faithful to his Commandments. To please the Lord is to show love to your neighbour. To please the Lord is to be free from corrupt practices. To please the Lord is not to cheat in examinations. To please the Lord is to be faithful to your vows as a priest or religious. To please the Lord is to be a good parent. To please the Lord is to have respect for your elders and parents. To please the Lord is to join in the mission of the church to spread the Good news of Christ. My dear people of God to please God we must ask for his assistance, to understand his will, through prayers. Through prayer you come to know the plans of God for you. Do not neglect your prayers. Prayer keeps you in communication with God. In Prayer we become one with God.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells us that he who loves his life loses it and he who hates his life will keep it for eternal life". Yes, the Christian must be prepared to bear the cross of our Lord, even if it means forsaking life in this world. This world is not our home. Our final resting place is with God. The penny Catechism teaches us that God made us for eternal life. We are asked: Why did God make you? And we respond: "God made me to know him, to love him, to serve him and to be happy forever with Him in the next". With this in mind, we should live in preparation for the life to come. Your mind should be focused on heaven and how to get there. Engage in works of charity. Vivian Ogu was noted for her works of charity to those in need. You can do same and even more. Stop the acquisition of material possessions that you won't take with you when you die. No one will take cars or houses or money or any earthly thing away from this life. There will be nothing like I was the Governor of my State or I was the Principal of a School, or I was a Parish Priest or President of a Church Society. Only your good deeds will speak for you on that day.

May I use this opportunity to speak to our youths and children. You are the future of the church. You are the future of our country and world. How you will live in the future depends on the foundation

you lay for yourself now. A foundation and future without God is bound to end in futility. I encourage all of you youths and children to be docile to the Spirit of God. Learn from the good examples you see around you. Vivian Ogu is an example for all of you. Read about her life and cultivate her good deeds to help shape your future. I urge all of you my dear young people not to be afraid: live and be witnesses to your faith wherever you are. You have every reason to show you are strong, confident and courageous. Thanks to the light of faith and the power of love. When you encounter opposition from the world, make the Apostle's words your own – "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). This is how saints behave.

We are all called to be saints. To be a saint, we must live good and virtuous life. This can only be possible when we cultivate the right attitude to prayer, to love, to share our faith with others and above all to reach out to a power outside of us that can enable us to live the virtues in a way we could never do on our own. That power is found in Jesus Christ. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, "Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues"(no. 1811). Sanctifying grace is Christ's divine life in us, transforming our selfish hearts with the supernatural love of Christ Himself. The more we grow in Christ's grace, the more we are able to love supernaturally – above and beyond what our weak human nature could ever do on its own. May God be with you always and may he protect you from every evil and grant you success in all your endeavours. Amen.

#### **5. APPRECIATION TO NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS COMMITTEE**

**Before I conclude let me thank the Chairman and members of the Local Organizing Committee of the just concluded National Mission Congress hosted by our Archdiocese. I commend your hard work and how meticulously you planned and executed your plans; making the Congress a huge success. May God bless all of you and reward you abundantly. At the appropriate time I shall thank you more concretely.**

**6.CONCLUSION:** As we celebrate the Tenth anniversary of the Martyrdom of Vivian Ogu, we celebrate her heroic victory over sin and death. She has fought a good fight and finished her race, what awaits her is the crown of glory. Her story has shown that all hope is not lost in this generation. She has become a living example of what it means to serve the Lord. She is a holy and virtuous example to our young generation and at the same time a source of challenge to the older ones to live a life of purity. She has left us important tools for achieving a life of holiness – knowledge of God and the courage to bear witness to him.

Our world today lacks the active witnessing of dedicated Catholics, young and old who are imbued with an undying passion for their faith. This is not because they are not available, but because they have given up on the world and each person has turned to personal sanctification and ecclesia services. No one is saved alone. And to seek to pursue one's salvation while neglecting the mission to 'bring the lost sheep into the fold' is to act greedily. And our Lord will not reward with His kingdom those who act with greed for self-salvation. We are all brothers and sisters, and members of the same family of God's people. The interests, joys and pains of one should be the interests, joys and pains of all. No one can live comfortably when his neighbor is not comfortable. It is an undisputed fact that when one has tasted the joys of union with Christ, one cannot but become an ambassador for Christ to others. Thus, if our faith conviction is sincere and true, it will necessarily impel us to reach out to others in love.

Vivian has lived her life, what is left is ours. Are we willing to assist our young boys and girls to live holy and virtuous life? Are we ready to control our appetite for the things of this world? Are we ready to take care of the poor and vulnerable or we are ready to take advantage of their plight and prey on them? In all of these, we have a shared responsibility to be holy and live virtuous lives.

These young ones look unto us as role models. They come to us for direction, so, we are duty bound to love and care for them. Let us not lead them astray. We ask of the Lord strength and virtue to remain faithful to our Christian calling. And may our Mother Mary assist and support us on our journey here on earth to live lives worthy of the calling we have received. May the grace of God the Father and the love of God the Son and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

May God bless you all.