



PAX

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...Peace on earth to men of goodwill

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Wisdom Corner

"The great gift of Easter is hope. Christian hope which makes us have that confidence in God, in His ultimate triumph, and in His goodness and love, which nothing can shake."

CHRISM MASS:

Bishop Umoh Admonishes Priests To Protect, Cherish Holy Order

By Rev. Fr. Stephen S. Udo

The Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene, Most Rev Camillus Umoh has admonished the priests of the Diocese to protect and cherish the Sacrament of Holy Orders by which they were constituted priests in the mind of Christ and the Church. He stated this during his homily at the celebration of the 2024 Chrism Mass in the Diocese.

Addressing the gathering of the clergy on the altar, Bishop Umoh noted that the Chrism Mass which is usually celebrated in the morning of Holy Thursday, a day before Christ underwent the Cross and died for the salvation of mankind "recalls that moment of grace that God appointed you to share in his ministry of proclaiming the Good News of Salvation to the whole world". He therefore

congratulated the priests on the occasion even as he thanked the faithful for their care for the priests thus making it possible for them to serve faithfully.

The Bishop, who is noted for his sound

catechesis as was evident on his Pastoral Visits, noted that there is a conscious fight instituted by unholy ideologies to destroy the very basic principle of human existence, the family. "Today we hear

of all sorts of things being propagated to destroy the very fundament of our human existence. The devil has no other duty except to destroy what we hold dear." He noted that these ideologies now maintain that the family is no longer important and should not be seen as the basic element that continues to procreation. They therefore promote same sex marriage,

transgender and the likes in a community known as LGBTQ. He warned that the devil is fighting the family in the guise of 'human rights and freedom'. The Bishop had taken upon himself to correct the errors about the Sacrament of Matrimony during his Pastoral Visits in the course of the celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Diocese.

Umoh pointed out that besides the institution of marriage, the Sacrament of Holy Orders is also under attack. He called on the priests and deacons to guard protect and cherish the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He taught that Jesus Christ instituted the "Sacrament of Holy Orders along with the

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CHRISM MASS:....

Eucharist so that through this means, God's salvation may be available to everybody. Now people are attacking the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The evil ideologies have begun to propagate teachings different from what Christ handed over to his Church. They claim that the priesthood is no longer necessary, that it is not exclusive for men".

"My dear brother Priests, on the day that we celebrate the institution of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, on the day we celebrate the gift that God has given to us, I want to urge you to understand fully what you have; why you should hold on to it; why you should protect it; why you should love it; why you should make it available to those who

would come after us by preserving the dignity of the Catholic priesthood as it has always been and as it is meant to be", he said.

Bishop Umoh taught that through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, Jesus Christ makes a priest part and parcel of His Being. Thus, the priest is an alter Christus, another Christ. By this Jesus wants the

priest to be holy just as Jesus is holy; and to sanctify the people of God. He urged the priests to "maintain the dignity and sanctity of the priesthood so that the people of God may see in you the Christ whom you represent". Umoh maintained that "there is great responsibility attached to being an alter Christus; and that responsibility is to represent Christ at all times, in all circumstances even to the point of shading your blood if it comes to that". He taught that priests do not carry out

their own duties but participate in the duty of Christ Himself who came not to be served but to serve and to give himself as ransom for many.

The Bishop further taught that the Catholic priesthood is not a means of survival. He warned that any person who sees the priesthood as a means of economic emancipation should not seek it because the Catholic priesthood must be a deliberate and conscious choice to answer the call of Christ. He warned priests to be careful that the priesthood is not brought to disrepute through their words and actions and the manner they conduct their affairs.

He challenged the priests to revisit the Rite of Ordination and reflect on the promises they made and the prayers that were said on them on the day of their ordinations; even as he advocated for sacrificial love and mutual communion within the presbyterium and called for mutual correction among the priests rather than living in enmity and thus scandalizing the faithful. He further advocated for an exemplary priesthood as a brotherhood that people would always look up for intercession.

The Bishop used the occasion to express his appreciation to the laity who have been supporting and advising the priests while admonishing them against disgracing their priests in public. "If your priest has done anything wrong, go to him and tell him what you have seen and what you have heard as a brother and a friend. Please do not carry unfounded stories about your priest. Do not manufacture stories in order to bring your priest down. If there is anything that the priest has done, go to him in the spirit of love and tell him". At the same time he admonished the priests to accept advices and fraternal corrections with humility. The Bishop concluded his homily by calling on the congregants to always pray for God's guidance and grace upon their priests noting that the priestly life is not an easy one.

The Chrism Mass has a special place in the hearts of priests for there they place in their hearts

and before their minds the renewal of the promises they made at ordinations. The Bishop concelebrates the Chrism Mass with his college of presbyters. It is here also that he consecrates the holy Chrism, from which the Mass takes its name. The Holy Chrism is used to anoint the newly baptized, to seal the candidates for confirmation and to anoint the hands of priests and the heads of bishops during their ordination. It is also used to anoint pillars and altars during the dedication and blessing of Church buildings and Altars.

The Oils of Catechumen and the Sick are also blessed during the Chrism Mass by the Bishop. The Oil of Catechumen is used in the preparation of the candidates for their baptism; while the Oil of the Sick is used to bring comfort and support to the sick and the infirmed. According to the tradition of Latin liturgy, the blessing of the Oil of the Sick takes place before the end of the Eucharistic prayer while the blessing of the Oil of Catechumen and the consecration of the Holy Chrism take place after communion.

The three oils that were blessed during the Mass are the oils traditionally used by the Church in celebrating the Sacraments. Outside these oils, no other oil is allowed for use in the Catholic Church neither by the clergy nor the laity. The oils are available for use throughout the year and until the next celebration of the Chrism Mass when these oils will be blessed for pastoral and liturgical uses.

Not less than one hundred priests renewed their priestly promises at the occasion. These included all the priests serving within the Diocese either as priests incardinated into the Diocese or priests from religious communities and priests who are assigned to one apostolate or another in the Diocese. Ikot Ekpene Diocesan Priests serving in institutions outside the Diocese also came home for the renewal of their priestly promises.

Palm Sunday Celebration: Christ Walks The Street Of Ikot Obong Edong

By Augustine Mendie

The Palm Sunday re-enactment of Christ triumphant entry into Jerusalem together with his suffering to crucifixion, in St. Vincent De Paul Parish, Ikot Obong Edong, was indeed both amazing and divinely profitable.

From Dibue/Ibong road junction, Christ represented by his priests, moved through Ibong road on to Umuahia road by Salantic Park and into the Parish center for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Christ's faithful thronged behind the priests singing, dancing, jumping and clapping for their Lord and Saviour. Like the Hebrews these parishioners recognized Jesus thereby presenting to him to the world, waving

palms at Dibue/Ibong Junction, the presiding priest and the Parish Priest of the Parish, Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Ekutt stated that the history of the celebration of Palm Sunday has come a long way, in fact more than two thousand years ago, when Christ entered into Jerusalem triumphantly. He said Christians, the world over re-enact the joy as they showcase Christ to the world as their king and Master of the universe.

Ekutt called on all Catholics to subsume themselves in the celebration not only to revel in it saying the Palm Sunday celebration is the beginning of the Holy Week. In his homily at Mass, Father Ekutt warned against empty and external display of happy emotions and exhorted all Christians to allow the activities of

Christ. Presiding over the Liturgy, Rev. Fr. John Maisor held that the occasion was not a mere remembrance of Christ last supper but proper re-enactment of what happened two thousand years ago. He called on the faithful to think about the institution of the Holy Eucharist and Priesthood saying there cannot be Holy Eucharist without Priest or vice versa.

Fr Maisor cautioned against claiming to love the Eucharist but hate the priest adding "you must love both as a matter of faith. You cannot believe in the Eucharist without believing in your Priest who is the custodian and minister of the Holy Eucharist.

The Good Friday Celebration was presided over by Rev. Fr. Alphonsus Abia. Earlier, all

pseudo Christ was beaten, reviled, spat on while others cried, nailed and rolled themselves in sympathy akin to what obtained on the way to Calvary.

Fr. Abia however intimidated that Christ passion and crucifixion dramatized was not for the fun of it. He called on the faithful to consider all the characters at the event and reflect on what would be their stand if they were there.

Very. Rev. Fr. Patrick X Ekutt mounted the saddle on Holy Saturday. From the Lucernarium-service of Light to the baptism of the Catechumen and to the Holy Mass, Ekutt held away powerfully during the liturgy and rites.

Holy Saturday, Vigil of Easter, peaked in prominence having the



their palms as they moved from street to street

Many wayfarers who came in contract with the happy throng stopped momentarily to join in the celebration. They nodded their heads, sang along and even enthused "through Mary Our Mother", while the crowd echoed, "we succeed".

While blessing the

the Holy week sink into them for salutary spiritual impact. His homily bore much fruit on the faithful as they turn out en mass to attend Chrism mass at the Cathedral in the midweek.

The faithful gathered again on Holy Thursday at the Parish center to commemorate the last supper of our Lord Jesus

parishioners gathered yet again at Ibong road junction to watch the trial, passion and eventual crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross, dramatized. From there the throng moved with the tortured Christ along Dibue road back to the church where he was nailed to the cross and died. From one station of the cross to another the

Local Ordinary and Chief Shepherd of the Diocese Most Rev. Camillus Umoh in attendance.

Easter is a time Christians the world over, reflect on the trauma of Christ's passion, crucifixion and eventual resurrection of Jesus Christ from the death for our redemption.

Bishop Umoh Commissions New Evangelizers At Breaking Of Fast, Harps On Maintaining Undiluted Tradition

By Fr Stephen S. Udo

The tradition of breaking Lenten Fast as a family has come to stay in the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene. This informed the gathering of the faithful, clergy, religious and laity around their Bishop at the Diocesan Retreat Center on the Friday of the fifth week of Lent, 2024. The breaking of the Fast came with added colour as no fewer than thirty persons were commissioned as evangelizers with the authority to share in the work of evangelization in their own way.

The Bishop, Most Rev Camillus Umoh in his homily maintained that the Doctrines and Tradition of the Church does not need personal initiative and innovation. He taught that Christ left the Gospel, the Good News, for the Church to pass from one generation to another unadulterated, undiluted. He maintained that the Church's Tradition has been handed down from the time of the Apostles untainted and uncorrupted. The Bishop therefore taught that no one has the right to add and subtract from the Church's Tradition at his whims and caprices. He therefore warned against

unnecessary creativity with regards to the Church's tradition: "In the handing over of the tradition of the Church, there is no creativity of any kind. You hand it on as raw as it was given to you. We must be very careful if providence has permitted us to share in the handing over process of this tradition". The Bishop stated that it is for the sake of maintaining the undiluted tradition of the Church that those who are called to serve must make resolutions to maintain that same tradition.

Bishop Umoh exhorted the baptized to properly maintain and nourish the faith and doctrines that they received at Baptism so as to render account to God on the judgement day.

While congratulating the candidates for commissioning as evangelizers, he noted that they have been called to participate in their peculiar manner in the duty of spreading the Good News. He however exhorted them to follow Church directives: "It is a very wonderful thing that you have been called and chosen to participate; but note that the Good News is not your own. Note that there are guidelines and

regulations guiding the process of transmission and the process of reception must be kept. I congratulate you for the challenge you give yourselves to be the faithful evangelizers. I thank you for desiring to participate and for accepting the call that God has given to you today, that you become a participant in this process of evangelization".

Noting that they have been trained for three years in preparation for the commissioning, he admonished them to be faithful to what they have been taught. He reminded them that the promises they were going to make are very significant and therefore they should never take lightly but rather ensure they keep them faithfully; "Do these promises mean anything to you or are they just simple empty words that carry no value?" he queried.

Umoh warned that those who make promises to God should mean what they say noting that the "reason why there are many broken marriages, many radical priests and reckless religious men and women is that often those who make promises to live a life do not mean what they say". He

admonished "those who make promises to enter into one state of life or another should note that they are only sharing in what does not belong to them".

Basing his reflection on the readings of the celebration, Umoh admonished the faithful to let their words correspond with the promises they make. "When the words of your mouth correspond with the intentions of your hearts to bind you with the person who called you, you will be protected because God himself who called you saw your weaknesses and decided to call you. He will protect you no matter what you go through... Do not be afraid of those who attack you for doing the right thing, your defence will not come from you. God will always be on your side".

In the same vein, the Bishop exhorted lay leaders in the Church to go beyond the spoken words of their oath of office and make the words to be their action words, guiding principles and foundations for their actions and attitudes as leaders in Church and society. He admonished all not to be intimidated by attacks against them for doing the right thing

because "your defence do not come from you, for we have the assurance of Jesus who told his disciples: "do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say."

The Bishop noted that in the Diocese, "we have formed a tradition, a very good tradition of our diocese which is unique for us, to gather once during Lent and once during Advent; and from time to time to come here on this holy ground that God has made holy for us and pray together. We have formed a tradition for the generations that will come. We want to hand over this tradition to them unadulterated, undiluted and with all amount of seriousness, with all amount of gratitude to God, this tradition will not end".

He thanked God who made it possible to form such a tradition even as he prayed that "the words of our mouths that we speak on this ground correspond with the intentions of our hearts". The Local Ordinary concluded his homily by exhorting the entire faithful to always mean what they say especially in prayers because "when we mean and believe what we say, God will answer because

God Himself always means what he says".

Thirty-four candidates were commissioned as evangelizers in the School of Evangelization including a posthumous commissioning of a late student of the School.

The Diocesan Coordinator of the School of Evangelization, Mr Maurice Udousoro expressing his appreciation to the Local Ordinary described him as a "good shepherd in need and indeed who provides good sense of direction for spiritual growth and development". In the same vein, he thanked the resource persons for directing them to rediscover themselves and appreciate the teachings of the Church.

Udousoro thanked the directors and chaplains of the School in their efforts to make the school an excellent training ground for evangelizers. He noted that the school board ACTEN executive as well as the trainers utilized practical approaches to drive home their message. He thanked the guardians and sponsors of the School for their unflinching support financially and spiritually.

St Vincent DePaul Parish Plays Host To Parish Creation Commission

By Augustine Mendie

Members of the Parish Creation Commission were in St Vincent De Paul Parish, Ikot Obong Edong on fact finding mission a fortnight ago.

Led by its chairman, Very Rev Fr. Augustine O. Akpan, the Commission was treated to a warm welcome by the clergy and faithful of the parish.

Father A. O. Akpan poured encomiums on the parishioners, thanking them for their sacrifices particularly for coming out to wait for the commission.

He enunciated that members of the Commission were emissaries bringing good tidings from the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese, Most Rev. Camillus Umoh, despatched to the Parish for fact finding mission

concerning the creation of more parishes.

Going down memory lane, he said parishes were created earlier in the Diocese and in particular St. Vincent De Paul had benefitted from the exercise with two parishes emerging out of it. He listed the two parishes to include Immaculate Conception Parish, Ikot Ekpene and St. Mary Parish, Abiakpo Ikot Essien, saying these were proper outstations of St. Vincent De Paul.

Continuing, the Commission chairman stated that it had become necessary again for more parishes to be created across the diocese to mark the 60th Anniversary Celebration of Ikot Ekpene as a Diocese.

Fr. A. O., as fondly

called by his admirers, intimated that creation of parishes this time around was not as a result of agitations from the faithful but they would be created as Anniversary gifts to the affected areas found worthy of such largesse from the Diocese.

Pertaining to St. Vincent De Paul parish, he said the two outstations, Ikot Otu and Ikot Obiokpon had been proposed to stand on their own as parishes, hence their coming for proper assessment of both membership and facilities within the two stations. He said it has been observed that the township is expanding and more people evolving as they return to their base making it a necessity for parish centres to be nearer to the people. Thus as the town expands,

there is the need for more parishes to come out of St. Vincent De Paul.

While congratulating Ikot Otu and Ikot Obiokpon for qualifying to partake of Bishop's good intention, he however reiterated that the purpose of creating a new parish is for proximity, that is bringing Christ closer to the people, to elicit better participation at any liturgical function. Father further assured that the exercise was not to render the new parishes as paying centres. "Parish creation should not be seen as imposition or looking for new financial paying centre, rather it has good purpose and that is, for proximity to avoid people travelling many kilometres to access parish centres", the chairman explained.

He called on mother parishes to collaborate with the new ones to ensure the provision of such basic facilities as land, church building and erection of father's house. He equally called on individuals to note that they have a duty to help in terms of valuable contributions, membership drive through the Legion of Mary, even as he called on the two proposed parishes not to worry about the paucity of their number. He however exhorted the beneficiaries to steer clear from crises of any form whether in mind or ideas.

Responding on behalf of their people, the presidents of the two proposed parishes, Mr Charles Esu of Ikot Otu and Mr Kenneth Nyah of

Ikot Obiokpon, thanked the commission for being the bearer of such good tidings to them. They expressed pleasure over the announcement and sent their unalloyed appreciation to the Bishop for finding them worthy to benefit from his goodwill.

In particular, Mr Kenneth Nyah of Ikot Obiokpon, who accepted the offer, said he and his brethren used to be afraid when they knew their autonomy was imminent, but with the chairman's explanation, they would not have any iota of doubt about their ability to stem the storm of a new parish.

During inspection, it was observed that Ikot Otu station did not have enough land for possible

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Bishop Umoh Celebrates Passion Sunday at Abiakpo, Warns Against Capital Sins

By Esidor Umoren and Veronica Ekanem

St. Anne Parish, Abiakpo Ikot Essien played host to her Chief Shepherd, Most Rev. Dr. Camillus Umoh on his pastoral visit to the parish. This event took place on Palm Sunday, a day the Universal Church celebrates Christ Passion in commemorations of his suffering, death and resurrection.

The celebration started with a procession from Ikpong Road Junction. With jubilation of songs and dance, the faithful moved behind their Priests and the Bishop in commemoration of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, singing "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the

Lord Hosanna in the Highest".

The Bishop used the occasion to catechize on Capital sin in his homily. He noted that Capital sin is a behavior or disposition that engenders other sins. He identified them as envy, anger, lust, slut, gluttony, jealousy and hatred. Harping on envy, the Bishop taught that having envy or hate against someone can make a person to kill another person. He noted that one of the reasons the Jews hated Jesus was because they were envious of him. They envy Jesus because; they could not do what He doing. Jesus Christ was killed out of envy, he noted.

The Bishop noted that Jesus was handed over to his executors as a result of anger, envy, jealousy and hatred. He was betrayed and abandoned by his trusted allies. When it was time for Jesus to be killed, the disciples left Him. Here, the sinfulness of betrayal came to play. Judas sold him out because he was greedy. Judas also betrayed His master by kissing him and he was paid for his singular act. The Bishop said that people like Judas still exist in the church, society, family etc. He therefore asked, "What are the gains of betraying someone? What are the gain of backbiting and envy?"

Bishop Umoh warned against envy, noting that it is a dangerous vice. "If you are envious of your neighbor, it will lead to many wicked act like; stealing, killing and many others", he noted, adding that it is only the spirit of humility that takes away envy in one's life even as he called on all Christians to embrace humility in their daily living.

He challenged the faithful to overcome the capital sins. With reference to anger, the Bishop queried: "What really make people angry in the church? Are people angry because they are cheated in the church? Are people angry

because there are sins in the Church? Are people angry because they are not able to take care of their lives? Are people angry in the church because of hindrances to repentance?" He admonished the faithful to get over things that anger them in the Church and continue the work of evangelizing Christ.

The Chief Shepherd further admonished the faithful to shun sins and worship God in spirit and in truth. They are to listen to the teachings of the Church during the Holy Week, reflect on them to turn a new live; noting that the death of Jesus was not the end, there shall be a resurrection and Christ shall overcome death.

The Local ordinary urged candidates for confirmation to begin their work of evangelization by denouncing evil and opting firmly for God. He encouraged them to deepen their faith in God and the Church so as to be able to proclaim Christ by their way of life. They are to go out to the world to evangelize with their faith and also be ambassadors of Christ.

The Laity President, Dr. Idongesit I. Udoh in his welcome address on behalf of the Parish expressed his appreciation to the Bishop who despite his tight schedule carved out time to visit the Parish for the pastoral visit on such a unique day as Palm Sunday. He used the occasion to inform the bishop of the pastoral growth of the parish, noting that such growth is thanks to the untiring efforts of the parish priest and his assistant.. He further pledged the continued support of the parish to the Bishop as the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese.

In appreciation, the Parish Priest Very Rev. Fr. Gerald Akata, expressed his gratitude to God Almighty for making the day a success, He extended his appreciation to the Local Ordinary, the Vicar

General, Very Rev. Fr. Anselem Etokakpan, Religious and Priests present, the thanked the laity council members as well as the entire faithful of the parish for their sacrificial donations and support despite the economic situation of the country. He congratulated the candidates who received the sacrament of confirmation even as he prayed for God continuous blessing upon the Bishop, Priests, Religious and the entire faithful of the diocese.

In response, the Bishop, Most Rev. Camillus Raymond Umoh relying on the Parish slogan "The Good People of St. Anne", "in God we Trust" enjoined the faithful to practice trust for God knowing that He is the all-powerful God. "When we have trust in God, we will never be found wanting in the world". His Lordship appreciated the efforts of the Parish Priest, Very Rev. Fr. Gerald Akata for his constant support and love he has for the Parish. He thanked the Parishioners of St. Anne Parish for their kind gesture, love and support towards the growth of the parish and the diocese as a whole. No fewer than forty-one persons received the sacrament of confirmation at the occasion.

The event ended colorfully as the youths rolled out drums with their cultural attire in a cultural entertainment with melodious tune.

The celebration had in attendance the Bishop, Most Rev. Camillus R. Umoh, the Parish Priest, Very Rev. Fr. Gerald I. Akata, the Assistant Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Cyprian Obot, Very Rev. Fr. Francis Akpan, Very Rev. Fr. Prof. Anthony Umoren, MSP, Rev. Fr. Idara Otu, MSP, Rev. Fr. Joseph Obotamah, the Consecrated Persons, prominent sons and daughters of the parish and the entire parishioners of St. Anne Parish, Abiakpo Ikot Essien.

Church

Understanding Easter

During this year of faith we should strive to understand the seasons of the Church better so as to grow in faith. Each season helps us to reflect on our lives and deepens our relationship with our Triune God. Easter is considered to be the season of seasons just as the Eucharist is considered to be the sacrament of sacraments.

Easter is derived from the Latin *pasch* which means Passover. Therefore Easter is the Christian Passover feast, the feast of all feasts. The brilliance of Easter illuminates all other feasts and seasons of the Church. Through His resurrection, Jesus did not just come back to life but transcended this life and united us with the Trinity. As the CCC (*Catechism of*

the Catholic Church) #638-639 reminds us, the resurrection is real and this is what we profess each Sunday in the Creed and celebrate in the Eucharist.

The period of Easter is so important that it lasts 50 days, with the feast of the Ascension celebrated 40 days after Easter and the feast of Pentecost on the fiftieth day. The first eight days after Easter is called the Easter Octave. During the Easter period the newly baptised as well as all of us should spend time reflecting on the Paschal Mystery (the passion, crucifixion, death and burial, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension CCC 512) and the graces we have received through it.

Jesus' whole life is a mystery, his incarnation, hidden life, public life, his passion, death and resurrection (CCC 512-514). The resurrection culminates the rest of His life and the summit of our redemption was the shedding of His blood on the cross. When we meditate on the Easter mystery we avail ourselves to the graces God offers us. So it is important to spend time during this Easter period meditating and reflecting upon this great mystery of life.

Easter is the period when we spend time preparing ourselves for the outpouring of His Spirit. We should "enter the upper room" as the apostles did and pray for the spirit and

pray for God's gifts which will help us to become kingdom builders. Remember, we received these gifts at baptism and unwrapped them at confirmation. Are we using them?

Each Sunday is an Easter because Christ rose on the first day of the week and radically changed the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day. Easter is seen as the eighth day. The first creation is the seven days and the new creation through Christ is the eighth day (CCC 349). Jesus' death and resurrection redeemed the whole of creation. The seven days of creation were renewed by this eighth day.

During this time lapsed Catholics are encouraged to return to the sacraments. Easter is a time of great grace for all.

Know Key Facts About Easter

Questions

- 1) How many days is the Easter Season?
- 2) What is the liturgical colour of Easter?
- 3) On what important feast does the Easter season end?
- 4) What important feast is celebrated within the Easter season?
- 5) Which is the most important feast of the Church and why?
- 6) What is the Octave of Easter?
- 7) What special privilege is given to lapsed Catholics during Easter time?
- 8) Why is Easter called the eighth day?
- 9) Why is the Sabbath now on Sunday, the first day of the week?
- 10) Why do we worship on Sundays?
- 11) Why is Easter known as the Christian Passover?

Answers

- A. 50 days
- A. White
- A. Pentecost
- A. Ascension
- A. Easter, because it illuminates all other feasts.
- A. The first eight days of the Easter season.
- A. To be reconciled with the Church
- A. Christ renewed all creation so a new day has dawned.
- A. Christ rose on the first day of the week.
- A. It is the day of the resurrection and each Sunday is like Easter.
- A. It is the great Christian feast that celebrates God's saving power.

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Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese

AFTER SIXTY YEARS OF IKOT EKPENE DIOCESE, WE ARE THE EASTER PEOPLE AND ALLELUIA IS OUR SONG!!!

During the Easter period, we commemorate the joyful celebration of Christ's resurrection. This celebration continues for fifty days and terminates on Pentecost. The saying, "We are the Easter people and Alleluia is our song" is often attributed to St. Augustine. St. Augustine was the first to proclaim this fact in an Easter Sunday sermon to the faithful of his Diocese of Hippo. What St. Augustine meant in that Easter Sunday sermon when he taught his people what it means to be "Easter people," was simply this: their faith in Jesus Crucified and Risen must be lived by imitating Him in daily life by the way they spoke, thought and acted. Anything else was a betrayal of Jesus and their faith. It was true then and is just as true today and will always be true.

In our days, the saying became more popular when Saint John Paul II addressing the Australian Church in 1986 said: "We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song." St. John Paul in the context of the popular saying noted: "We do not pretend that life is all beauty. We are aware of darkness and sin, of poverty and pain. But we know Jesus has conquered sin and passed through his own pain to the glory of the Resurrection. And we live in the light of his Paschal Mystery—the mystery of his Death and Resurrection. 'We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song!'" What the Saintly Holy Father meant here is that by his resurrection, Jesus shows that suffering, disappointment and death can be transformed into new life. By the Easter Celebration, the pattern of life of the Christian is configured to that of Christ who died and rose from the dead on the third day. Therefore, we Christians have the hope of the resurrection.

*Although Christ arose from death and after appearing to his disciples for a period of forty days ascended to the Father, Christ is everywhere. He lives and breathes through his Body, the Church. Thus when St. John Paul said we are the Easter People, he meant that the resurrected Christ is alive in his Church, in each of the members of the Church as a chosen people; so that we live as a people, **all parts of Christ's Body working together toward a single purpose: love.***

After we have made the long way through Lent by keeping the discipline of Lent of intense prayer, active good works of charity and the doing of sincere penance; actively participated in the sacred rites of the Holy Week and especially the Easter Triduum, leading up to the Great Easter Vigil of the Lord's Resurrection, we now live in the resurrection. We believe Jesus rose from the dead and that we, too, will one day be resurrected.

But are we truly the Easter people? If we say yes, then for this yes to be true and sincere, we must actually live like Easter makes a difference in our lives. That is what St. Augustine was preaching in that Easter Sunday sermon. That is what St. John Paul re-echoed to the Australian Church; that is what is re-echoed to the faithful of Ikot Ekpene Diocese after sixty years of existence as an independent local Church. If we say no to this proclamation, that is truly a great sadness. We have literally wasted Lent and more. We have wasted the time the merciful God has given us to use His grace to correct our faults and to conform our very lives and persons more closely to Jesus.

It is not coincidental that the conclusion of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Diocese falls on Easter Saturday. It is in the Divine Plan of God who decided through the instrumentality of the Holy Father Pope John XXIII to create the Diocese. For the faithful of the Diocese, the 2024 Lent was a period of sober reflection on the strengths and weaknesses, individually and collectively with a view to leaving behind the Diocese of our dreams to future generation. That future generation begins with our young ones who did not witness the creation of the Diocese, and who may not be alive to

witness the Centenary of the creation of the diocese. The Lenten period was therefore a great period of retreat for the faithful of the Diocese to reflect on the successes and failures geared towards real communion and mission in the journey of faith in our Diocese.

It is very possible that in the next one hundred years, most of those alive now would not be alive. But history will recount our contributions for the growth of the Diocese.

The yearlong celebration witnessed many innovations among which was the celebration of the Second Synod of the Diocese. The spirit and mien of the Synod led us not only to rethink the Diocese at its inception with only about eight priests and a handful of the faithful, it led us through the long journey of sixty years and pointed out the direction that the diocese must take to achieve full communion of all its children in the journey of faith. With the presentation of the Acta of that Synod at the concluding Mass of Celebration, a roadmap, a blueprint, has been put in the hands of the faithful this Easter that would enable them be truly the Easter people with an Alleluia song.

Let it not be that after experiencing the joy of the Easter Liturgy and that first proclamation of "Alleluia!" our lives would return to a fairly normal routine, along with all the bickering and worries, the disunity and oppositions, the apathy, the sacramental and liturgical abuses.

Yes, the social order may not be conducive for spiritual and pastoral striving; we may be dwelling in sin even as we approach the Easter celebrations; we may be undergoing sufferings which may not be of any fault of ours, and even if it may, in the Cross is our redemption. The challenges of misgovernance as a result of bad leadership and followership in the nation; the challenges of insecurity, and insincerity even among Church people etc. make it more difficult for the Christian to allow the Easter Alleluia to truly and positively affect his life.

Yet, although we celebrate Easter amid sin and suffering, in a world that continues to turn, the Resurrection confirms the reason for our hope, that in the Cross there is redemption. Even when Christ's power and messianic greatness are obscured by the crosses of our lives, we can know by faith that His glory is hidden within the Cross and rejoice in the redemption that God our Father is working out for us, through the merits of His Son. In the midst of difficulties, we can proclaim, "He has risen! Alleluia!"

Sixty Years after the creation of Ikot Ekpene Diocese; having gone through a General Assembly, two Synods and various pastoral initiatives of present and past leaders; having witnessed the astronomical growth of the Diocese with respect of not only pastoral agents but increase in number of faithful and relishing the rich pastoral tradition of our forebears; and concluding the Celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary within the Octave of Easter, we are called upon to be the Easter People and in the words of St. John Paul on Holy Saturday 2000, "We proclaim this witness to the world, so that the joy which is ours will reach countless other hearts, kindling in them the light of the hope which does not disappoint" and "May [our] lives become a song of praise to the Most Holy Trinity and a witness of love which knows no limits."

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrated on the Second Sunday of Easter. Divine Mercy Sunday is a recent addition to the Church's calendar, and it has links to both private revelation and the Bible. Millions of people look forward to and are profoundly moved by this day.

What is it, and why is it so important to them? Here are 9 things you need to know.

1. What is Divine Mercy Sunday? Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrated on the Second Sunday of Easter. It is based on the private revelations of St. Faustina Kowalska, which recommended a particular devotion to the Divine Mercy. It also has links to the Bible and the readings of this day.

2. When Was it Made Part of the Church's Calendar? In 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized St. Faustina and, during the ceremony, he declared: "It is important then that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church *will be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday'*". In the various readings, the liturgy seems to indicate the path of mercy which, while re-establishing the relationship of each person with God, also creates new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings (**Homily, April 30, 2000**).

3. If This is Based on Private Revelation, Why is it on the Church's Calendar?

In his theological commentary in *The Message of Fatima*, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote: We might add that private revelations often spring from popular piety and leave their stamp on it, giving it a new impulse and opening the way for new forms of it. Nor does this exclude that they will have an effect even on the liturgy, as we see for instance in the feasts of Corpus Christi and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

From one point of view, the relationship between Revelation and private revelations appears in the relationship between the liturgy and popular piety: The liturgy is the criterion; it is the living form of the Church as a whole, fed directly by the Gospel. Popular piety is a sign that the faith is spreading its roots into the heart of a people in such a way that it reaches into daily life. Popular religiosity is the first and fundamental mode of "inculturation" of the faith. While it must always take its lead and direction from the liturgy, it in turn enriches the faith by involving the heart.

4. What Does the Church Do to Encourage the Celebration of Devotion to the Divine Mercy on this Day?

Among other things, it offers a plenary indulgence:

To ensure that the faithful would observe this day with intense devotion, the Supreme Pontiff [John Paul II] himself established that this Sunday be enriched by a plenary indulgence, as will be explained below, so that the faithful might receive in great abundance the gift of the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

In this way, they can foster a growing love for God and for their neighbour, and after they have obtained God's pardon, they in turn might be persuaded to show a prompt pardon to their brothers and sisters. . . .

A plenary indulgence, granted under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intentions of Supreme Pontiff) to the faithful who, on the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday, in any church or chapel, in a spirit that is completely detached from the affection for a sin, even a venial sin, take part in the prayers and devotions held in honour of Divine Mercy, or who, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed or reserved in the tabernacle, recite the Our Father and the Creed, adding a devout prayer to the merciful Lord Jesus (e.g. Merciful Jesus,



I trust in you!").

5. What is the Divine Mercy Image?

The Divine Mercy image is a depiction of Jesus based on a vision that St. Faustina had in 1931. There have been a number of paintings made of this image. The original, though not the most popular one today, is shown above.

A basic explanation of the image is:

Jesus is shown in most versions as raising his right hand in blessing, and pointing with his left hand on his chest from which flow forth two rays: one red and one white (translucent).

The depictions often contains the message "Jesus, I trust in You!" (Polish: *Jezu ufam Tobie*).

The rays streaming out have symbolic meaning: red for the blood of Jesus (which is the Life of Souls),

and pale for the water (which justify souls) (from Diary - 299). The whole image is symbolic of charity, forgiveness and love of God, referred to as the "Fountain of Mercy".

According to the diary of St Faustina, the image is based on her 1931 vision of Jesus [source].

6. What is the Chaplet of Divine Mercy?

The Chaplet of Divine Mercy is a set of prayers used as part of the Divine Mercy devotion.

They are usually said using a standard set of Rosary beads, often at 3 p.m. (the time of Jesus' death), but with a different set of prayers than those used in the Marian Rosary.

For more information about the chaplet, including how to pray it, you can [CLICK HERE](#).

7. How is the Divine Mercy Devotion Linked to the Scripture Readings for the Second Sunday of Easter?

The Divine Mercy image depicts Jesus at the moment he appears to the disciples in the Upper Room, after the Resurrection, when he empowers them to forgive or retain sins.

This moment is recorded in John 20:19-31, which is the Gospel reading for this Sunday in all three yearly Sunday liturgical cycles (A, B, and C).

This reading is placed on this day because it includes the appearance of Jesus to the Apostle Thomas (in which Jesus invites him to touch his wounds). This event occurred on the eighth day after the Resurrection (John 20:26), and so it is used on the liturgy eight days after Easter.

(It also, however, includes the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on Easter evening, a week earlier, in which he empowered them to forgive or retain sins.)

8. How Did Jesus Empower the Apostles to Forgive or Retain Sins?

That part of the text reads:

[21] Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."
[22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
[23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

He thus gave them a special empowerment with the Holy Spirit to forgive or retain sins.

9. How Does this Relate to the Sacrament of Confession?

It relates directly to it. Jesus empowered the apostles (and their successors in ministry) with the Holy Spirit to *either* forgive *or* retain (not forgive) sins.

Because they are empowered with God's Spirit to do this, their administration of forgiveness is efficacious — it really removes sin rather than just being a symbol of forgiveness a person is already thought to have obtained.

Because they are instructed to forgive *or* retain, they must discern which they are to do. This means that they need to know about the sin and whether we are truly repentant of it. As a result, we must tell them about the sin and our sorrow for it. Hence: confession.

And the Church Fathers understood Christ's ministers as having this power.

Catechism Lesson For The Month Of April, 2024

THE CHRISTIAN CONSTITUTED SALT AND LIGHT THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS

Introduction: We are still in Part One of our catechesis on Salt and light of the World. In March, we treated the Second sub theme in our Catechesis. We identified ways that the Church demonstrates the identity of salt of the earth and light of the world thus: through the Magisterium, through the Church's Social Doctrine and also through the life of witnesses of her children. In this month, our focus is on how the Christian is constituted salt and light through the Sacraments.

The Church the Sacrament of Christ guides Her Members to be Salt and Light: The purpose of the Church is the continuation of the redemptive sanctifying work of Christ through the Holy Spirit. The *Catechism* teaches that "all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is His Body" (CCC, 846-848). A person cannot have God as his father if he does not have the Church as his mother. The Catechism further teaches that "the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit", and its Sacrament (CCC, 737-738). The Church is the Sacrament of Salvation, that is, the means and sign by which God offers salvation to humanity. It is as the sacrament of Christ that the Church guides her children to live out their identity as salt and light.

The seven sacraments flow from the Church, are the sacraments of Christ. The Sacraments are the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spread the grace of Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body (CCC 774). They "are powers that come forth from the Body of Christ" (CCC 1117). As the Sacrament of Christ "in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity" (738). The Church is the light of the world and the salt of the Earth (Matthew 5: 13-16). It is as salt of the earth and light of the world that the Church brings salvation to the world. The Church is the Sacrament of Christ; and as the Sacrament of Christ, She caused the seven Sacrament to flow from her. In other words, the Church administers the sacraments; and is herself the Sacrament of Christ. The Sacraments are the actions of Christ. Following this teaching by the Catechism, it is evident that the Church as the Sacrament of Christ guides her faithful children to live their identity as "salt and light", to bear witness and make present in the world the mystery of Christ. Thus the Christian, through the grace of the Holy Spirit which he receives in the Sacraments, "spread the grace of Christ"; he flavours and illumines the temporal order preserving it by the grace of the sacraments.

The Christian Is Constituted Salt And Light Through The Seven Sacraments: Generally speaking, the sacraments have a common mission, the mission to evangelize. This is called the sacramental mission. This sacramental mission is anchored on the great command of Christ to the disciples after his resurrection to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt 28:19); "The mission to baptise and so, the sacramental mission, is implied in the mission to evangelize..." (CCC, 1112). Again, "The Purpose of the Sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ, and finally to give worship to God. Because they are signs, they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects, they also nourish, strengthen and express it. That is why they are called sacraments of faith (1123).

A. The Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Christ instituted baptism as the rite of initiation into the Christian Church. The Christian, through his incorporation into Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism, is invited by Christ to be salt and light of the world. During Baptism, the newly baptized is given lighted Candle which symbolized the life of Christ which they are now incorporated. The celebrant takes a candle and lights it from the Easter Candle and gives to parents saying: "Receive the light of Christ. This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly." Our light is a "reflected" light since Jesus himself, the Sacrament of God, is the true light: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12).

In the pre-Vatican II Rite of Baptism for infant, salt was placed in the mouth of the infant. This was to indicate that the infant has entered into the Christian life, a life of value and wisdom, a life that preserves and flavours the world. It was an invitation for the baptized to use his life to flavour and illumine the world.

Pope Francis notes that the Christian is salt given to us by God during Baptism. He maintains that through the Sacrament of Baptism, Christians are called to be salt "to give of oneself, to give flavour to the lives of others, to give flavour to many things with the message of the Gospel". Baptism empowers the Christian to be light to illuminate, be salt to give flavour and to preserve. Hence, "Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven" (Matt 5:16).

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, all Christians have

received the regenerating grace of the Spirit by which they become children of God. They share in the common priesthood. *The Catechism* puts it this way: "The whole Church is a priestly people. Through Baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is called the 'common priesthood of the faithful'" (CCC 1591, LG 29). By this, they are called to bring men and women into a relationship with God. The Christian as salt and light brings salvation to the world. Being baptismal or common priests, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Lumen Gentium*, is fundamentally about living as a witness by a holy life and active charity.

Through our baptism we have received the light of Christ and are called to reflect Jesus' light by following His way of humility, mercy, and peace. These are the "good deeds" that define who we are as followers and disciples of Jesus. Like Jesus' light, our light should not draw attention to ourselves but to God.

Since baptism constitutes the Christian as salt and light, we are to flavour the world and illumine the darkness of the world through our good deeds. Because of its long-lasting, preserving nature, salt became a symbol of enduring friendships and a sign of a contract between persons or groups. As "salt of the earth," Jesus' followers bring out the best flavours in life, preserve the good news of Jesus' loving presence, and are faithful friends of God.

At the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Christian is conferred with the Holy Spirit. By this Sacrament, Christ unites the faithful intimately with Himself. *The Catechism* states: For "by the Sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed" (1285). Thus, the confirmed become true witnesses of Christ, "to confess the name of Christ boldly and never to be ashamed of the Cross" (CCC 1303).

Like baptism, those who have received the Sacrament of Confirmation receive an indelible character that can never be erased from their soul. They are by the Holy Spirit which they received to be salt and light to the world.

The Eucharist is an expression of God's love who gave himself for us in the form of bread and wine. Such is the Eucharist that whenever we receive it we are invited to share this love with others. By its very character, the Sacrament of the Eucharist constitutes the believer salt and light of the world. The gathering of the assembly at the Table of the Lord nourishes and empowers the faithful to live, preserve and flavour the society.

The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the two main part of the celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist flowing into each other, together work the effects on the faithful. At the Penitential Rite, the faithful are led to sincere repentance, receive forgiveness and thereby made worthy to partake in this most sacred sacrifice of Christ which he did for the forgiveness of sins.

Being thus cleansed from sin, he is empowered at the Table of the Word. The Liturgy of the Word then presents the faithful with the instruments for evangelization. Having been so nourished at the Table of the Word through the preaching of the minister (Priest) he himself can nourish the society with what he has been nourished. He is to take the word, live it and spread it by his actions.

At the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which is the climax of the celebration, we are nourished by the sacred Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave his life for us and commanded us to love one another. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) states that everyone who has participated in the Mass should be "eager to do good works, to please God, and live honestly, devoted to the Church, putting into practice what he has learnt and growing in piety. He will seek to fill the world with the Spirit of Christ and in all things, in the very midst of human affairs, to become a witness of Christ" (SC, 9). Ths at the end of the Mass they are sent on mission, "ite missa est", to go and announce the good news they have received.

B. The Sacraments at the Service of Communion: Whereas "Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist are sacraments of Christian initiation. They ground the common vocation of all Christ's disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission to evangelize the world" (CCC1533), the two sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony make the Christian salt and light through the vocations they offer to the recipients. The *Catechism* refers to these two as the Sacraments at the Service of Communion. They are ordered not only to the salvation of the one receiving the sacrament, but are also ordered toward the salvation of others, building up the Kingdom of God (CCC, 1533-1534). These two Sacraments are Sacraments of Vocations: vocation to the ministerial priesthood, vocation to married life.

The sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders bestow on Christians a specific vocation and mission in the Church: "Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God" (CCC 1534). These sacraments have a

common mission; they are directed towards the salvation of others; the *Catechism* states: "Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are consecrated in Christ's name to feed the Church by the word and grace of God. On their part, Christian spouses are fortified and as it were consecrated for duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament" (1535). Thus whereas Holy Orders sanctifies the people of God, nourishing them with the sacraments and guiding them through the ministry of the ordained, Matrimony build up the kingdom of God by procreation and raising godly children that leavens the society with gospel values.

As vocations, they are meant to help others grow in holiness; to liven the world with the Spirit of Christ. Thus by the reception of these Sacraments, the recipients are constituted salt and light of the world so that by their peculiar way of life they may guide, preserve and flavour the faith of others.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders exemplifies salt of the earth in a unique way. It makes the presence of the Church visible and audible to the world. The *Catechism* states "Through the Ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers" (1549). People thirst for the Word of God and the person of Christ "We seek to see Jesus" (John 12:21). It is through the service of the ordained minister that this thirst is often fulfilled. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is a visible and audible, as well as subtle and silent, presence of Christ and His Church in the world. Through the ministry of the ordained, Christ works for the preservation of the world against corruption. The life of witness of the ordained minister stands as a measure of value in a world that has lost its sense of proportion and worth.

The real purpose of marriage is The mission of marriage according to the Church is to be a value that reflects the relationship between God and his people. The Church teaches that through marriage, individual can experience healing, sanctification and redemption. In the Sacrament of matrimony, the family is constituted the domestic church; the light of Christ to one another and the world; "thus in the footstep of Christ, the principle of life, they will bear witness by their faithful love in the joys and sacrifices of their calling to the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his death and resurrection" (Gaudium et Spes, 52).

Summary:

1. The Church is the Sacrament of Christ. She guides all her members to live out their identity as salt and light.
2. Since the sacraments are powers that come forth from the Body of Christ, the Christian, through their reception is empowered to spread the grace of Christ. He flavours and illuminate the temporal order by preserving it through the grace of the sacraments
3. The sacraments of Christian initiation express the baptismal identity of the Christian as salt and light. By these sacraments, they are commissioned to share in the evangelizing mission of the Church.
4. Through the sacrament of Baptism, Christians are called to be salt and received the light of Christ. Through Confirmation, they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be true witnesses of Christ in words and in deeds. Through the Holy Eucharist, they are empowered at the Tables of the Word and the Eucharist and sent forth to announce the Good News.
5. The sacraments of Holy orders and matrimony are sacraments directed towards the salvation of others. As vocations, they are meant to help others grow in holiness; to liven the world with the Spirit of Christ.

Conclusion: Christ Himself, the Sacrament of God, defined the identity of his followers as salt of the earth and light of the world. He established the Church, his Body as the means of salvation for mankind. The Church is the sacrament of Christ to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth.

One of the images of the Church is the Light of the World. It bears the light of Christ to the world through the sacraments and by them empowers her children to live their identity as salt of the earth and light of the world. Thus the make manifest the identity of the faithful as salt of the earth and light of the world.

The faithful are empowered to project the image of salt and light by their exemplary ways of life within the Church and especially within the larger social order where they are to preserve their taste for "if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again?"; where they are called to "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:13-16).

Memoirs Of The 2024 Chrism Mass



Memoirs Of Breaking of Lenten Fast and Commissioning of Evangelizers



60th Aniv. Decoration Of Ambassadors Of Communion



Palm Sunday Celebration Abiakpo Ikot Essien Parish



Nto Edino Denary Youth Summit



Advertorial



Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene
ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL, OKON
Essien Udim L.G.A., P.O. Box 43, Ikot Ekpene
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Admission 2024/2025 Session

Entrance Examination Dates

23RD MARCH, 2024 **18TH MAY, 2024** **TIME: 10:00AM**

Admission Procedure

- PICK THE ADMISSION FORM
- TAKE THE ENTRANCE EXAMS
- TAKE INTERVIEW
- WHEN SUCCESSFUL, GET OFFER OF ADMISSION WITH PROSPECTUS
- PAY ACCEPTANCE FEES/DEPOSITS
- PAY FEES AND RESUME

Facts about
St. Joseph
Catholic
School, Okon

- It is a Catholic Secondary School in the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene established in honour and as a memorial to mark the 100th Birthday of His Eminence, Late Dominic Cardinal Ekandem (First Bishop of Ikot Ekpene)
- It is coeducational
- It is for all children without discrimination based on faith or denomination
- It is full and compulsory boarding
- It is located in a serene environment in Okon (behind St. Joseph Parish, Okon, Essien Udim)

Exams Venue

- Christ the King Nursery/Primary School, No. 32, Dominic Utuk Avenue, Uyo
- St. John Pro-Cathedral, Abak Parish
- Holy Child Int'l Nursery/Primary School, GRA, Ikot Ekpene
- School Premises



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stjosephcathsch@gmail.com | www.stjoseph.sch.ng

...guaranteed the best that education can offer

Time:
9am
At:
School Premises
Exams Date
Saturday
20th
April, 2024

Register online @
www.scossi.sch.ng
or by phone 07037809022

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About SCOSCI

- Our facilities are up to date
- Our teachers are experienced formators
- Our goal is to achieve unrivalled excellence
- Our system ensures the safety and protection of our students
- Our core values include hardwork and integrity
- Our score sheet reads a merited 100%
- Ours is not just a school. It is more of a family, but most of all, a 'home of wisdom'

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2024/2025 Academic Session ADMISSION into JS1 and SS1

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF IKOT EKPENE
**ST. COLUMBANUS
SECONDARY SCHOOL, IKWEN**
OBOT AKARA LGA, P.M.B. 1109, IKOT EKPENE,
AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA.

ST. COLUMBANUS FULFILLS ADMISSION PROMISES Reels out Discounts and Scholarships to Mark Anniversary

Keeping to his word, *the Principal of St. Columbanus Secondary school, Ikwen, Rev. FR. EMEM Umoren, splashed the candidates for 2024/2025 Admissions with a lot of Discounts and scholarships to enable more people benefit from the rich heritage of the school. One person gained full scholarship; 10 people had partial scholarship, wide ranging discounts were given to about 50 candidates. 27 candidates from the Catholic diocese of Ikot Ekpene also received additional discount. This gesture was highly commended by stakeholders, parents and beneficiaries. FR. EMEM had earlier published that these offers would be made available to mark the 65th Anniversary of St. Columbanus Secondary school, Ikwen. By these offers, he has fulfilled his promises. Meanwhile, as this Citadel of learning braces up for its supplementary examination into JS1 and SS1, come 20TH April, the general public is invited to explore. One final opportunity of enrolling in a unique school family. Registration is online at www.scossi.sch.ng. St. Columbanus is the answer.

On The Bishop's Catechesis: Setting The Records Straight

By Rev Fr Stephen S Udo

It is the responsibility of a bishop to ensure that the faithful of his Diocese are fed with sound and orthodox doctrines, thereby protecting the faith of his people against doctrinal errors and syncretism. With the challenging circumstances of the new world order, this responsibility becomes very necessary if he is to safeguard and ensure orthodox teaching of the Church as well as protect the faith of his subject.

It is on record that the Catholic Bishop of Ikot Ekpene, Most Rev. Camillus R. Umoh has special interest in ensuring that the orthodox doctrinal definitions of the Church especially as regards faith and morals, the sacraments and liturgy are preserved, maintained and transmitted undiluted and unadulterated to the next generation.

During his pastoral visit to all the Parishes, within the context of the 60th Anniversary Celebration of the Diocese, the Chief Catechist undertook a systematic catechesis on the sacraments especially Holy Matrimony. He stated the reason for this at the gathering of the faithful during Chrism Mass, 2024 at his Cathedral: "During our pastoral visits that had just come to an end, I decided to remind ourselves of the importance of the sacraments both for our personal sanctification and for the good of the Church. In the Parishes, I concentrated more on the Sacrament of Matrimony because of the danger that this particular sacrament is facing in the world that we live, especially in the fight that has been instituted through unholy ideologies to destroy the very basic principles of the human existence, that is, the family. Today we hear all sorts of things being propagated to destroy the very

fundament of our human existence. The devil has no other duty except to destroy what we hold dear." Noting that these ideologies now maintain that the family is no longer important and should not be seen as the basic element that continues to procreation, he undertook a catechesis towards correcting the errors.

In almost every parish, the Bishop took time to ensure that the faithful understand and appreciate the Church's teaching about marriage and the family. His teachings on this subject are mostly based on the Catechism and the Code of Canon law.

The topics covered by the Bishop included

1. Marriage Consent:

Here the Bishop taught thus: Marriage is brought into being by the lawfully manifested consent of persons who are legally capable. The Bishop mentioned three general principles of consent thus:

- There must be a real act of consent by both parties. This is absolutely necessary and no human power, parents, family, state or church can supply this consent.
- The consent must be 'lawfully manifested'. Marriage is not merely a private matter between the spouses but has important implications for the whole society. Accordingly, entrance into it is effected not by a purely private exchange of consent, but by a public ceremony involving certain legal or customary formalities. Thus, the canonical form of marriage must be observed.
- The parties must be 'legally capable' of marriage, i.e. they must not be bound by any diriment impediment which renders them incapable of any marriage or of this particular marriage.

To these three requirements correspond, in general terms, the three ways in which a marriage may be invalid: defect of consent, defect of canonical form, and the existence of a diriment impediment.

2. Impediments in Marriage: the Bishop also taught about impediments in marriage. He identified three ways in which a marriage may be invalid. He mentioned that a diriment impediment is an objective circumstance attaching to a person which, in virtue of either divine or human law makes that person incapable of validly contracting marriage. Some of the impediments listed by the Bishop included

- The impediment of non-age. It is to be noted that in Nigeria, while the Marriage Act sets 18 as the legal age for marriage, the Child Rights Act of 2003 sets the national legal minimum age of marriage at 21.
- Impediment of impotence: Impotence will, however, invalidate a marriage only if it is antecedent, perpetual and certain.
- The impediment of the bond of a previous marriage: a person obligated by the bond of a previous marriage, even if not consummated, invalidly attempts marriage.
- The impediment of disparity of cult: a marriage is invalid when one of the two persons was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it and has not by a formal act defected from it, and the other was not baptized.
- The impediment of sacred orders: those who are in sacred orders invalidly attempt marriage.
- The impediment of public perpetual vow of chastity: those who are bound by a public perpetual vow of

chastity in a religious institute invalidly attempt marriage.

g) The impediment of force: no marriage can exist between a man and a woman who has been abducted, or at least detained, with a view to contracting a marriage with her, unless the woman after she has been separated from her abductor and established in a safe and free place, chooses marriage of her own accord.

h) The impediment of crime: one who, with a view to entering marriage with a particular person, has killed that person's spouse, or his or her own spouse, invalidly attempts this marriage. They also invalidly attempt marriage with each other, who, by mutual physical or moral action, brought about the death of either's spouse.

i) The impediment of consanguinity: marriage is invalid between those related by blood in all degrees of the direct line, whether ascending or descending, legitimate or natural. In the collateral line, it is invalid up to the fourth degree inclusive.

j) The impediment of affinity: affinity in any degree of the direct line invalidates a marriage. This impediment is based upon a relationship through a valid marriage. It exists between the man and the blood relations of the woman, and between the woman and the blood relations of the man. The local Ordinary has the power to dispense from it.

k) The impediment of public propriety: the impediment of public propriety arises when a couple live together after an invalid marriage, or from a notorious or public concubinage. It invalidates marriage in the first degree of the

direct line between the man and those related by consanguinity to the woman, and vice versa.

l) The impediment of legal adoption: those who are legally related by reason of adoption cannot validly marry each other if their relationship is in the direct line or in the second degree of the collateral line.

Marriage can be declared null and void under the following conditions:

- if there is an impediment;
- if there is a vitiated consent;
- if there is a lack of proper form.

Again a n impediment of previous bond is about a former marriage. Thus one who had wedded in the church and whose former spouse is still alive cannot marry another person in the Church, that person is bound by the previous bond. There is also the impediment of sacred bond which forbids priests and religious from entering into a valid married union.

All these impediments are attested to in the Code of Canon Law, but for the purpose of this paper and for want of space, we have not quoted the Canons.

3. Mater and Form of the Sacraments: The Bishop also took time to teach about the irregular and sinful unions which are threatening the institution of marriage and family. Marriage is ordered toward the procreation of children and the legal supports given to marriage are given with that end in view. Marriage needs the protection of laws because society must be concerned about its own preservation and continuity into the next generation.

He also emphatically taught about the mater and form sacraments: The bishop taught that every sacrament has mater and

form. He taught that the mater of the sacraments is the physical tangible objects used in the celebration of the sacrament. Thus the mater of Baptism is water, the mater for Confirmation is the Holy Oil of Chrism, the mater of the Eucharist is the bread and wine and the mater of marriage is one man and one woman. He was emphatic in teaching that without the proper mater, no sacrament can be validly administered.

The form of the Sacrament is the spoken words through which the proper minister of the sacrament uses in administering the sacrament. Thus every sacrament, to be valid must have mater, form and proper minister.

With reference to the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Bishop taught that the Mater of the Sacrament is the couple: one man and one woman; not one man and one woman nor one man and many women, etc. He mentioned that the proper ministers for Matrimony are the couples themselves. Using the proper form "I, do take you..." and before the official witnesses, makes the marriage a valid relationship. He therefore mentioned that homosexuals, lesbians and transgender persons cannot validly contract marriage.

The Bishop has thus presented the authentic and orthodox teaching of the Church on the Sacraments and especially on Matrimony. Any misrepresentation of the teaching through either print or electronic media and even discussion is hereby laid to rest. For further enquiry on the Pastoral Catechesis of the Bishop, contact the Editor in Chief of the PAX Newspaper, the principal communications medium of the Diocese.

POLITICS OF TERRORISM: A Bloody Means to Territorial Conquest and Capture of State Resources (Part 2)

By Jude Inyangetoh

5.0 GRIM STATISTICS OF UNWARRANTED DEATHS

Records from the Nigerian Security Tracker (NST), a project of the Council on Foreign Relations Africa Programme, indicates that deaths from Nigeria's internal wars of mainly ethnic, religious, political and economic motivation between 2011 and 2023 is conservatively estimated at over 98,000. Of this number, the period between May 2015 and May 2023 recorded the highest number of deaths put at about 63,000 while about 5,000 deaths have been recorded in the last 7 months from May 2023 to December 2023 – a clear indication of heightening insecurity in recent times.

In addition to deaths and the wanton destruction of properties, the country has become a haven for the bloody business of kidnapping and mass abduction for ransom. A network of criminal enterprise built around the dreaded killer herdsmen that gained notoriety and loathsome prominence under the watchful eyes of former President Buhari, is said to be the biggest player in the blood-letting industry. The NST report shows that over 17,000 kidnapping incidents took place between 2015 and 2022, of which bandits extorted a whopping sum of 18 million dollars in ransom from their victims. The Abuja-Kaduna train kidnap victims alone, coughed out a princely 6 billion naira ransom to the bandits.

In another special report sponsored by the United Nations and tagged, "Mapping the potentials of Transitional Justice in Katsina State", it stated that 24

terrorist cells spread across about 30 forests, exist in the North-West region of the country. The report indentified each terrorist leader by name as well as the numerical strength of each of the cells. It went on to affirm that banditry menace started in Katsina State way back in 2010 in 7 L.G.As where 6 of them have common boundaries with Zamfara State.

According to the report, "Initially, incidents of banditry were low with minimal casualty figures but the situation has taken monumental dimensions in recent years especially with the reported massacre of some 200 residents across 3 communities in Katsina in 2015 as well as the ambitious abduction of over 300 children in a single attack at a school in Kankara on December 11, 2020".

Virtually, everywhere in Katsina as in its neighbouring Zamfara, Sokoto and Kaduna States have been ravaged by banditry characterized by mindless attacks on the rural populace, destruction of farmlands, killings, kidnapping, stealing of farm produce and rape, among other forms of violet assault perpetrated in a bid to spread fear and consequently drive away the people from their ancestral abode. This the report says "has been going on for more than a decade despite series of interventions by security agencies and government's ostentatious amnesty initiatives."

Quite surprisingly, all these happened in Katsina State when an indigene of the State was the number one Chief Security Officer of the Country and Grand Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic (GCFR), yet he could do virtually nothing to arrest the sore security situation in his home State and the entire North-West region that had come under the siege of terrorists, except that his

administration decided to nickname the marauding terrorists - bandits. Little wonder the Late General Sami Abacha said, "If insurgency lasts for more than 24hours, the government has a hand in it".

In his submission, Majeed Dahiru, a public affair analyst expressed concern about why the government has refused to act inspite of the mass of intelligent reports in its possession, regarding those who are involved in terrorism financing.

"I don't understand why government would be saying that it has intelligence about people that are responsible for something and they are not acting on it, I mean we are not seeing arrests, we are not seeing prosecutions. Even when the United Arab Emirates sent us a list of those that are sponsoring terrorism, we don't know who they are as we speak."

"Nigeria is the only country where you have large scale crime being committed and nobody can tell who is committing those crimes. So rather than speak out in this manner, government should be acting on the information it has," he advised.

6.0 CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying that the rising spate of insecurity perpetrated by criminal groups across the country has reached an epidemic proportion. Quite sadly, successive administration of government at the national level appears to be at a loss or seemingly clueless about the way out of this national security quagmire. Since the return of democratic rule in 1999, it is sad that our political system has steadily degenerated from bad to worse. Currently, the grounds have been sufficiently wetted to enable all manners of depraved elements (including militants and bandits) assume positions of authority across the various tiers of government. It is this failure of the Nigerian Leadership architecture that has further manifested in its apparent inability to fulfill the core mandate and primary responsibility of government, which is to provide security for the lives and properties of the citizenry. In addition, the sheer mis-management of our oil revenues over the years by a power-drunk crop of accidental leaders who know little or next-to-nothing about leadership, have consequently turned Nigeria into the poverty capital of the world.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

A long-term panacea could be the internalization of a value-based democratic framework in our polity backed by a credible electoral process.

A mid-term remedy would involve subjecting our entire security architecture to critical reforms that include weeding out all undesirable elements that may have found their way into the system to clog its progress. The so-called repentant Boko Haram members who were emptied into the Nigerian Army must be recalled as a matter of necessity. If repentant Boko Haram members must enlist the Army; then repentant IPOB members, repentant Niger Delta militants and repentant OPC militants must all be given a place in the Army, to balance out the nuisance propensity of each group.

As a short-term measure, government may have to consider engaging the services of war mercenaries like the Swiss Guard, Blackwater, Wagner etc. to help curb the menace, if indeed our security system is irredeemably incapacitated. The measure was quite effective in 2015 when

President Goodluck Jonathan deployed the services of foreign military contractors to annihilate and push underground remnants of the boko haram terrorists, in a space of three weeks. And the 2015 general elections held as planned without any form of infraction in the hitherto overran territories that the terrorists had boasted that elections won't hold. Sadly, the succeeding regime of President Buhari failed to renew the contract of the war mercenaries when he came on board and what happened to our country afterwards has now become the subject of this literary excursion.

Lastly, there is the need to adequately equip our security forces and as well provide them with enhanced welfare packages that would motivate them to always perform at their best.

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Pope To Rome's Nigerian Community: Embrace Unity, Reject Division

By Joseph Tulloch

Pope Francis meets with Nigerians resident in Rome, thanking them for their witness to the Gospel, and stressing that "the diversity of ethnicities, cultural traditions, and languages in your nation is not a problem, but a gift."

On Monday morning, Pope Francis received Rome's Nigerian community in an audience in the Vatican.

The Pope began by expressing his gratitude for their joyful witness to the Gospel message, as well as "the numerous young people from Nigeria who have heard the Lord's call to the

priesthood and the consecrated life", responding "with generosity, humility and perseverance."

Some of them were present at the audience, the Pope noted, encouraging them to "always be missionary disciples", grateful for the Lord's call "to zealously proclaim our faith and contribute to the building of a more just and humane world."

Richness in diversity

Pope Francis then turned to the subject of Nigeria's ethnic and cultural

diversity.

"The diversity of ethnicities, cultural traditions, and languages in your nation," he said, "is not a problem, but a gift that enriches the fabric of the Church as well as that of the entire society, and allows for the promotion of the values of mutual

seeds of social friendship and concord for both present and future generations."

In this regard, however, the Pope warned of a danger.

"The danger", he said, is one "of closure, of not being universal, but closing oneself off in an isolation

dialogue.

"Unfortunately," he observed "many regions of the world are experiencing conflicts and suffering, and Nigeria is also going through a difficult period."

The Pope assured listeners of his "prayer for the security, unity, and spiritual and economic progress of your nation" and invited them "to foster dialogue and to listen to each other with an open heart, without excluding anyone on political, social, and religious levels."

God's "style"

At the same time, the Pope encouraged them to be "heralds of the great mercy of the Lord," working for reconciliation and contributing to "alleviating the burden of the poor and the most needy" and embracing "God's style".

"Do not forget this," Pope Francis stressed. "God's style is closeness, compassion, and tenderness."

By adopting this style as their own, the Pope said, "all Nigerians can continue to walk together in fraternal solidarity and harmony."

Listening to all

Finally, the Bishop of Rome recommended

understanding and coexistence."

The danger of closure

The Pope expressed his hope that the Nigerian community in Rome might "always resemble a great and inclusive family", in which "all can use their different gifts and talents, which are fruits of the Holy Spirit" to "support and strengthen one another in moments of joy and sorrow, success and difficulty."

In this way, he said, it will be possible to "sow the



DIVINE MERCY MESSAGE AND DEVOTION

On February 22, 1931 a young Polish nun, Sister Faustina of the Most Blessed Sacrament (Helen Kowalska), saw a vision of Jesus with rays of Mercy from the area of his heart. He told her to have an image painted to represent this vision and to sign it. "Jesus I trust in You". In a diary that Sister Faustina kept, she recorded series of revelations from the Lord between 1931 – 38 concerning the availability of His limitless mercy to even the greatest sinners. Jesus revealed special ways for people to respond to his mercy in their lives, and he gave her several promises for those who would trust in his mercy and show mercy to others.

By the time of Sister Faustina's death in 1938, devotion to the Divine Mercy had already begun to spread throughout Eastern Europe. The process for Sister Faustina's beatification was begun in 1966 and she was declared venerable on March 7, 1992. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Rome on April 18, 1993 and canonized by him on Sunday 30th April, 2000.

Sister Faustina's diary, written under obedience to the Lord and her spiritual director, is the main source of the message of Divine Mercy. The message points to the great need for mercy in our times. It reveals God's mercy as the answer to our present human condition, to our misery.

Rev. George Kosicki in his illuminating book on Divine Mercy (Come To My Mercy) says that what God wants of us is to turn to Him with trust. To trust God is to rely on Him who is mercy itself, knowing that He is God, and that He loves us and cares for us.

Our Lord calls out for sinners to come to His infinite mercy. Repeatedly His words to Saint Faustina emphasize that He is more generous toward sinners than toward the just and that His mercy is always available to us, no matter what we have done or what state we are in, even if our sins are as black as night and we are filled with fears and anxieties. Over and over again Our Lord stresses that He could never reject a repentant heart, never refuse an appeal to His mercy. Our Lord's fathomless mercy for sinners can be seen from the following excerpts of His desires and promises which He communicated to Sr. Faustina:

Let the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy.

I cannot punish even the greatest sinner if he makes an appeal to My compassion, but on the contrary, I justify him in My unfathomable and inscrutable mercy.

Tell sinful souls not to be afraid to approach Me; speak to them of My great mercy (1396).

The loss of each soul plunges Me into mortal sadness. You always console Me when you pray for sinners. The prayer most pleasing to Me is prayer for the conversion of sinners. Know, My daughter, that this prayer is always heard and answered (1397).

Write this for the benefit of distressed souls: when a soul sees and realizes the gravity of its sins, when the whole abyss of the misery into which it immersed itself is displayed before its eyes, let it not despair, but with trust let it throw itself into the arms of My mercy, as a child into the arms of its beloved mother. These souls have a right of priority to My compassionate Heart, they have first access to My mercy. Tell them that no soul that has called upon My mercy has been disappointed or brought to shame. I delight particularly in a soul which has placed its trust in My goodness (1541).

The All Holy God detests the smallest sin. He cannot love a soul which is stained with sin; but when it repents, there is no limit to His generosity towards it. "My mercy embraces and justifies it My Heart rejoices when they return to Me. I forget the bitterness with which they fed my Heart and rejoice at their return.

Conditions of God's Mercy

To obtain God's mercy, the following conditions must be fulfilled: First, there must be **repentance and conversion of heart**. The greatest sin imaginable is not too great to be forgiven, if the sinner is truly repentant. "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez. 33:11). Even the worst of



By Prof. Michael Ogunu

sinners God gives sufficient grace to repent and amend their ways. "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as wool" (Is. 1:18). While hardened sinners are never excluded from the grace of conversion, they can and at times do, resist God's invitations and inspirations, clinging to their own will and ideas.

The second requirement is to **be merciful to others**. God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. He wants us to extend love and forgiveness to others just as He does to us. While both the Old and New Testament reveal the limitless dimensions of God's mercy, the New Testament goes beyond the old in its emphasis on mercy as a divine characteristic which men must share. If they are to be the recipient of mercy, they must practice mercy. There are as many ways of exercising works of mercy as there are human needs. However, tradition has arranged the most common works of mercy into two series of seven as follows: **CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY**: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to give shelter to those who need it, to visit the sick, to minister to prisoners, and to bury the dead. **SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY**: to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead.

Our Blessed Lord, after explaining various ways in which merciful love responds to offenses and enemies, declares how we must be merciful to our fellow humans if we expect to receive divine mercy:

"Do not judge, and you shall not be judged; do not condemn, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they pour into your lap. For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you" (Lk. 6:37, 38).

Our Saviour laid down the same condition for mercy in the prayer He taught us: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Mt. 6:12). Those few words which we repeat often can bring us a more lenient or a more severe judgment according as we are willing or not willing to forgive others. "Judgment is without mercy to him who has not shown mercy" (Jas. 2:13). So it is not God who puts limits on His mercy, but rather we ourselves.

The third condition for receiving divine mercy is to **completely trust in Jesus**.

Trust in Jesus is the essence of the message of mercy. In repeated revelations to St. Faustina, Our Divine Saviour makes it clear that the fountain is His Heart, the water is His mercy, and the vessel is trust.

I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let them approach this sea of mercy with great trust (Diary, 1520). On the cross, the fountain of My mercy was opened wide by the lance for all souls — no one have I excluded! (1182). I am offering people a vessel with

which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: "Jesus, I trust in You" (327). The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is — trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive (1578).

..... The graces of My Mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is — trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive. Souls that trust boundlessly are a great comfort to Me..... I pour all the treasures of My graces into them (Diary 1578).

Repeatedly, in His conversations with Sister Faustina, the Lord spoke of His merciful response to souls that trust in Him. "I desire to grant unimaginable graces", He told her, "to those souls who trust in My Mercy Sooner would heaven and earth turn into nothingness than would My mercy not embrace a trusting soul" (Diary 687, 1777).

Over and over again He stressed that He could never reject a repentant heart, never refuse an appeal to His Mercy.

Devotion to Divine Mercy

Having known the desires and promises of our Merciful Saviour, how do we practice devotion to His divine mercy? Here are the devotional practices revealed through Sister Faustina and given to us as "vessels of mercy" through which God's love can be poured out upon us and upon the world: Through St. Faustina, the merciful Saviour has given the aching world new channels for the outpouring of His grace. These new channels include the Image of The Divine Mercy, the Feast of Mercy (Divine Mercy Sunday), the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Novena to The Divine Mercy, and prayer at 3 O'clock in the afternoon, the Hour of Great Mercy.

The Image of the Divine Mercy

In 1931, Our Lord appeared to St Faustina in a vision. She saw Jesus clothed in a white garment with His right hand raised in blessing. His left hand was touching His garment in the area of the Heart, from where two large rays came forth, one red and the other pale. She gazed intently at the Lord in silence, her soul filled with awe, but also with great joy. Jesus said to her:

Paint an image according to the pattern you see with the signature (inscription): Jesus, I trust in You. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory (Diary, 47, 48). I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: "Jesus, I trust in You" (327). I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world (47).

Our Lord promised many graces to those who honour the image of Divine Mercy:

By means of this image I shall grant many graces to souls. It is to be a reminder of the demands of My mercy, because even the strongest faith is of no avail without works (742).

The Feast of Mercy

Among all of the elements of devotion to The Divine Mercy requested by our Lord through Sr Faustina, the Feast of Mercy holds first place. The Lord's will with regard to its establishment was already made known in His first revelation to the saint. In all, there were 14 revelations concerning the desired feast.

The most comprehensive revelation can be found in Diary entry 699: **My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and a shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy.**

cont'd on Next Edition

Ami Ndi Eyen Katholik Series

EHB, 169: Mbok Obon (Da mi nte Okuo)

*Mbok Obon menyeneke se nnode fi
Obon mmono fi idem mi
Yak ami ndot ndinam utom nno fi
Da mi nte okuo*

1. *Obon mmono fi idem mi, yak ndot ndinam utom fo
K'usin eno idem mi mbok, Obon da mi nte okuo*
2. *Obon mmono fi ukut mi, yak ndot ndinam utom fo
Yak ufen fo edi idonesit mmi, da mi nte okuo.*

In our April 2023 edition, we reflected on the Hymn: *Jesus Obong Akan Mkpa* (Our Lord Jesus has conquered death), composed in 1970 by Brother Emmanuel Ating (now a priest and Vicar General, Pastoral, of the Catholic Diocese of Uyo). This year, given the concluding ceremony of the Jubilee Year celebration of our diocese on April 6, 2024, and without prejudice to the ongoing Easter celebration, we have chosen to reflect on a hymn of thanksgiving and self-offering, composed by the above-mentioned priest in 1972, two years after *Jesus Obong Akan Mkpa* was composed.

Fr. Ating, a renowned composer of many Catholic hymns, was ordained a Catholic Priest on July 26, 1980 shortly after the publication of the 1980 Edition of the *Efik Hymn Book* in 1980, before the creation of Uyo diocese in 1989 where he currently serves as the Vicar General. As a young composer and seminarian, he was coached by his elder brother of blessed memory, Late Alphonsus Ating to whose encouragement he owes most of his compositions, especially *Jesus Obong Akan Mkpa* (1970).

The hymn *Mbok Obon*, popularly known as *Da mi nte Okuo*, is very significant in the vocation story of the composer. Composed for seminarians in April 1972 at Oron when Brother Ating was sent with Msgr Joseph P. Ekarika of Blessed memory to start the Immaculate Conception Seminary, this hymn has inspired many vocations. Although, he wrote it for the seminarians to be singing during offertory, especially as they had no money to offer, little did he know that he was sowing a seed of which fruit he would become one of the beneficiaries. Five years later, in 1977, when he returned from Scotland and Ireland to the then Calabar diocese to continue his Seminary formation in Nigeria, he had an unforgettable faith experience with this hymn. In his words: "upon my return, I went to meet my Bishop, Most Rev Brian Usanga, at Calabar, with a written letter in which I had requested him to give me some time to discern my vocation. On arrival at Calabar, the Bishop was not available that evening and the Holy Mass was about to begin in the Cathedral. I decided to attend the Mass that evening. At that Mass, four of the songs that I had composed were sung, with *Da mi nte okuo* being one of them. I had been away for five years! And for the first time, so to say, I listened to the lyrics of this song in that Church and they haunted me! ... In that Cathedral Church that evening, for the first time in my life, I took a conscious decision to make myself available for the Catholic Priesthood. When, therefore, I

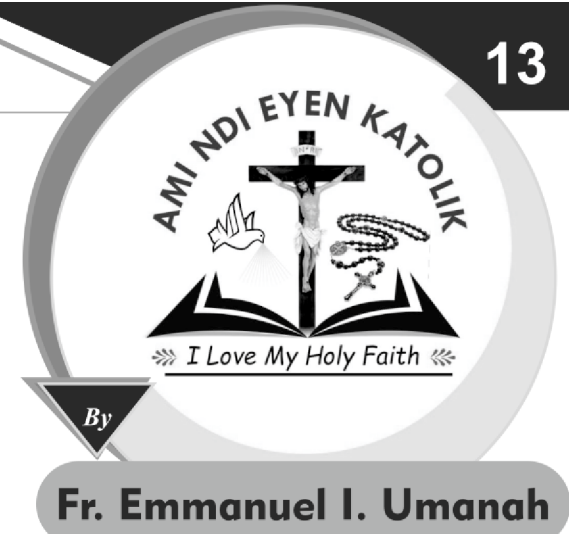
met with the Bishop the following morning, I had torn the letter, and only presented myself. And he asked me to go to Bigard Seminary, Enugu to continue my Theological Studies. The song was a single factor that settled my vocation!"

Mbok Obon is a hymn of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), and self-donation (*kenosis*). The composer seems to have been inspired by the words of the psalmist in *Psalms* 116:12-13, which also form the lyrics of an ancient traditional Latin hymn: *Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus, quae retribuit mihi?* (What shall I render to the Lord for His goodness to me?). Modern Nigerian composers have also written similar hymns; for example, *What shall I offer to the Lord to make Him happy* of Jude Nnam, *Nso ke ami ndinam nno Obon* and *Abasi nkebo [ke] nya ukom sosono* of Fr. Joseph Sandy.

This hymn seems to also have an Ignatian flavour. Having passed through Queen of Apostles Seminary, Afaha Obong, the composer must have known the *Suscipe* Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola, which may have influenced the composition. (*Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me*). This prayer itself also inspired the English hymn *Take my Heart and let it be*. More so, *Mbok Obon* also has something in common with a verse of the Italian offertory hymn *Guarda questa offerta* (Look upon this offering). It reads: *Che possiamo offrirti nostro Creatore? Ecco il nostro niente, prendilo, Signore* (What can we offer to you, Our Creator? Behold our nothingness, take it, Lord).

Da mi nte Okuo is better rendered, but not exclusively, with local instruments at Offertory during Holy Mass. Here, credit must be given to Late Msgr. Sylvanus Etok, who, as Rector of Queen of Apostles Seminary, Afaha Obong, during the Episcopal Consecration of Monsignor Ephraim Silas Obot as Auxiliary Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese in 1970, inspired the use of traditional instruments (traditional xylophone, placed on raw plantain stems, along with other traditional instruments) for the first time at worship in the history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. This was the first time that *Ecce Sacerdos Magnus* (*Sese Akwa Oku*) was sung in *Efik* Language. (Cfr. J. B. EKANEM, *Priest and Teacher: Life and Deeds of Rt. Rev. Msgr. Sylvanus U. Etok*, Akwa Ibom State University Press, Uyo 2016, p. 149). Fr. Ating, then a seminarian at the said institution, must have drawn inspiration from the event.

The lyrics of this nice piece communicate joy and gratitude. The Refrain, *Mbok Obon, menyeneke se nnode fi, Obon mmono fi idem mi. Yak ami ndot ndinam utom nno fi, Da mi nte okuo* (Lord, if I do not have anything to offer You, I offer myself to You, Lord. Make me worthy to serve You; make me Thine), expresses this deep desire to offer oneself in thanksgiving to God. Having accepted the love of God, who loved us first (Cfr. 1Jn 4:10) and gave His Only Begotten Son for our salvation (Cfr. Jn 3:16), the Christian is thus moved, in return, to place himself/herself at the



By
Fr. Emmanuel I. Umanah

service of God. Love begets love! The love of God is contagious and it inspires us to love in return (Cfr. 2 Cor 5:14: *Caritas Christi urget nos; Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 1).

The verses go further to offer, in details, our joys and sufferings (*idaresit ye ukut*) to God; or better put, our whole self (*ofri idem nnyin*). The first verse, *Obon mmono fi idem mi, yak ndot ndinam utom fo. K'usin eno idem mi mbok, Obon da mi nte okuo* (Lord, I offer myself to You; make me worthy to serve You. Please Lord, do not reject the gift of myself; make me Thine), offers the entire self to God while, at the same time, acknowledging one's own unworthiness. *Take me as I am!* Analogically, in this verse, the praying faithful (*Ecclesia orans*) recognises the uncleanness of his/her water – like the Samaritan woman – and yet, he/she does offer it (Cfr. John 4); Such a faithful recognises the insufficiency of his/her five loaves and two fish, and yet, offers them to Jesus (Cfr. John 6:1-14). The Lord does not, and will not, despise the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart (Cfr. Psalm 51:17). This hymn helps us to offer our "all" like the widow in Luke 21:1-4. The second verse is similar to the lyrics of the hymn *All to Jesus I surrender* and *Obon Jesus mayak idem mi nno Fi* (EHB, 183). Thus, in this verse, the faithful is resolved to offer his or her sorrows, as sacrifice to the Lord. In return, he or she draws consolation from the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. *Obon mmono fi ukut mi, yak ndot ndinam utom fo. Yak ufen fo edi idonesit mmi, da mi nte okuo* (Lord, I offer You my sorrows; make me worthy to serve You. May Your sufferings be my consolation; make me Thine).

Made up of two verses, this hymn is, indeed, a prayer of thanksgiving and self-donation. It confirms the saying that *no one is so poor that he has nothing to offer and no one is so rich that he lacks nothing*. Again, this hymn was composed at the time the writer was still discerning his vocation to the priesthood; it shows his desire to offer himself to God in return for the love he has received from God. Thus, this song also inspires vocation to the consecrated life. Furthermore, it calls on our youths to invest their talents in the service of God and His people, and our "grown-ups" to encourage our youths in their little efforts. As observed in our April 2023 edition, at some point when the young Emmanuel was dissatisfied with his composition – *Jesus Obong Akan Mkpa* (1970), his elder brother, Alphonsus, encouraged him to retain it and not discard it because he saw it as good. Today, it has become one of our best *Efik* Easter hymns.

After 60 years, let us, as a Church, sing this hymn, expressing our commitment to continuously offer ourselves to God and continue to be of service to God: *Mbok Obon, mmono fi idem mi. Yak ami ndot ndinam utom nno fi, Da mi nte okuo!* Amen.

News

Nto Edino Deanery Youth Meets For 2024 Youth Summit/Get-together

By **Udeme Thomas**

YOUTHFULNESS is a precious gift of God to be kept and cleansed always by Christ through the Sacraments. This was a message delivered by Rev Fr Solomon Uko to the youth of Nto Edino deanery during their 2024 Youths Submit/get-together held recently at the Deanery Center, Nto Edino. The theme of the Summit was "Youthfulness, A Golden Ladder To A Blessed Life".

Declaring the summit open, the Dean of Nto Edino and Parish Priest of St Andrew Parish Nto Edino, Very Rev Fr Cyril Ekemini Udouo thanked the leadership of the youth for the timely summit stressing

that it was well planned as youths must always gather to learn and relearn for their self development and for the growth of the church.

In his homily, Fr Solomon Uko stated that youthfulness is a precious gift from God to which the youth must handle with care. He said "You must acknowledge that what you have and are today is a blessing from God, to be handled with care and reference to him and the church. Relying on the readings of the day, Fr Solomon presented the case of lepers in the Old Testament times and noted that they were secluded from the community due to their sickness. The preacher revealed that as recounted in the Gospel, Christ has broken the

barrier between the lepers and the people. Jesus presents himself as a bridge that links them to God and the community of believers.

Further, Fr Uko exhorted the youth to use their youthfulness to work for God and be close to Jesus Christ. He admonished them to seek God's mercy through the Sacrament of Penance often, adding that the way you handle your youthfulness determines how your old age shall be.

Fr Uko encouraged the young Catholics to always create and spend time with God through visit to the Blessed Sacrament, personal devotion and spiritual commitment to pious societies.

In his welcome address, the Deanery Youth President, Mr. Emmanuel Nnanga expressed gratitude to God for the opportunity to serve the Church in that capacity. He expressed his sentiment of gratitude to the Dean, Very Rev Fr Cyril Udouo and the Deanery Youths Chaplain, Rev Fr Dominic Okon for their supportive role towards the development of the youth apostolate in the Deanery. He remarked that the theme of the summit was well thought out to reawaken the spiritual and social lives of the youth and so prepare them to take up responsibilities as future hope of the Church.

The Dean of Nto Edino Deanery and the Deanery Youth

Chaplain in their separate remarks charged the youth to wake up from their slumber and pursue their spiritual life with vigour. They encouraged the youth to claim ownership of the Church as their property.

Presenting a paper on the theme of the Summit, Rev Fr Edidiong Ukpannah defines youth as a time between childhood and maturity. He noted that youthfulness implies appearance, freshness and vigour. YOUTHFULNESS according to him is a period of transition from dependence to independence.

Fr Edidiong listed some factors that could serve as ladder to a blessed life which included such

virtues as discipline, kindness, honesty, patience, courage, health among many others. The clergyman further enumerated those impediments that could jeopardize young people from achieving a better life to include blaming others, holding onto grudges, negative self talk, living in the past, fear of failure, being judgmental as well as living in your comfort zone.

The session which was quite interactive allowed the youth to ask questions and the resource person did justice with them.

Activities such as welcome song presented by the youth of Mbat Esifon Parish and kingdom dance from St Andrews Parish youth added colour to the summit.

From Holy Thursday To Easter Sunday: A Pastoral Appreciation

"From (Thursday) until Sunday, we will live the central days of the liturgical year, celebrating the mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord. And we live this mystery every time we celebrate the Eucharist. When we go to Mass, we do not go only to pray, no: We go to renew, to bring about again, this mystery, the paschal mystery. It is important not to forget this. It is as though we were going to Calvary — it is the same — to renew, to bring about again the paschal mystery." — Pope Francis, Catechesis: The Easter Triduum

The word, "triduum" (TRIH-du-um) comes from the Latin word meaning, "three days." The Easter Triduum celebrates the three days of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, the most sacred time of the liturgical year. It begins at sundown on Holy Thursday, reaches its high point at the Easter Vigil, and concludes with evening prayer at sundown on Easter Sunday. It is also known as the Sacred Triduum or Paschal Triduum.

The liturgical celebrations of the Easter Triduum are rich in symbolism and flow from one to the other in a seamless way. They are "one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ's Paschal Mystery." More than 2,000 years later, we are still trying to grasp the meaning and power of what Jesus did for us.

It was Bishop Donald Hying who said that during Holy Week Catholics worldwide "gather to honor the humiliation, torture and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In a global culture that usually celebrates power, strength and beauty, this public veneration of something so horrible is always a little shocking. Could it be that what people find so absolutely compelling about the Passion narrative is the vulnerability of God? If God could become that poor, humble and vulnerable to love me, how can I ever stand on my own self-importance? This week, we celebrate the strangest things: weakness becomes strength, love conquers fear, miserable despair transforms into resurrected hope and perpetual death gives way to eternal life, and it's all because a naked criminal was thrown down on a cross 2,000 years ago, and he embraced it as if it were his marriage bed," he added.

We should let the Lord love us during Holy Week. The Triduum is a time for God to break open our hearts, so that the gracious torrent of Divine Mercy that flows from the side of the crucified Christ will wash us clean, forgive our sins and fashion us ever more deeply in the new creation of the Lord's saving death and resurrection."

Holy Thursday

During the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we mark the institution of the Eucharist and priesthood and re-enact the washing of feet. This Holy Thursday evening liturgy brings Lent to a close and begins the celebration of the Easter Triduum. Holy Thursday is traditionally known as Maundy Thursday. The word, "maundy," comes from the Latin, "mandatum" and means "commandment" or "mandate."

During the Last Supper, Jesus commanded the disciples to: "Do this in remembrance of me," (1 Corinthians 11:24) referring to the celebration of the Eucharist and "love one another," (John 13:34), which he demonstrated through the washing of the feet. At this Mass, we have the "opportunity to taste the surprising grace of the Eucharist and surrender to the consolation of the foot washing."

Good Friday

There is no Mass on this day of prayer and mourning. We fast and abstain from meat. We venerate the cross and receive the Eucharist reserved from Holy Thursday.

The altar is bare. The sanctuary lamp is out because the tabernacle is empty: Jesus is not there.

This is an "evil day when an innocent man was killed by the state. How could anyone possibly characterize the Friday on which this occurred as good? It is good because it is the day the battle was won. The day the power of sin and death was broken.

Holy Saturday

While Christ is in the tomb on Holy Saturday, he did something very important that often gets lost in the celebration of the Easter Vigil that evening. In the Apostles Creed we pray: "He descended into hell." Hell in this sense has a very different meaning than how we understand the term today.

Ikot Ekpene Diocese From Fifty To Sixty: A Journey Of Faith

By Rev. Fr. Stephen S. Udo

The journey of Ikot Ekpene as a Diocese began sixty years ago at its creation by Pope John XXIII in 1963. Bishop (Later Cardinal) Dominic Ekandem was the first Bishop. He kick-started the Diocese with the determination to implant the young Church with sound and orthodox Doctrinal practices in liturgy, spirituality and pastorals. Bishop Ekandem later handed over to Bishop Camillus Etokudo in 1988, who dedicated his episcopacy to the oneness of the Diocese with the motto "That they may all be One" and worked tirelessly towards that unity by consolidating the gains of the Cardinal first Bishop. In 2010, Bishop Etokudo was moved to Port Harcourt Diocese and the mantle of leadership fell on His Lordship, Most Rev Camillus Raymond Umoh.

In March 2013, the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene clocked 50 years of existence as a local pastoral territory of the Roman Church. The celebration was a welcome event for the Local Ordinary, Most Rev Camillus Umoh, who was barely three years old as bishop of the territory. The 50th Anniversary celebration witnessed the inauguration of the Retreat Center, as a spiritual and pastoral hub of the Diocese. Since its inauguration and up till today, that center has hosted many pastoral activities including retreats and pilgrimages. The center has become a hope materialized for the faithful of the diocese, who would be making use of it for spiritual retreats, pilgrimages, conferences, seminars etc. As the diocese celebrates the 60th anniversary, there is hope that the center, when completed will open the diocese to the wider world.

The construction of the Regina Pacis Auditorium at the premises of the St Anne Cathedral Ifuho, is a historical artifact and reference point of the Golden Jubilee of the Diocese. This gigantic auditorium was built to completion, donated and duly handed over to the Bishop of the Diocese by the then first family of Akwa Ibom State, Gov. Godswill Obot Akpabio. The handing over ceremony marked the conclusion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration.

Less than five years after the celebration of the golden jubilee precisely in 2017, the Bishop, clergy and the cross section of the

Known as the "mother of all vigils," the Easter Vigil Mass takes place after sundown. "On this holy night, the Church keeps watch, celebrating the resurrection of Christ in the sacraments and awaiting his return in glory. It is the turning point of the Triduum, the Passover of the new covenant, which marks Christ's passage from death to life." The Mass transitions into the baptism of those being initiated into the Church to show the connection between Christ's resurrection and ours.

Easter Sunday

St. Athanasius called Easter "the Great Sunday." The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls it the "Feast of feasts" and the "Solemnity of solemnities." Easter is the celebration of the Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

By taking on our sin, Jesus, through his passion, death and resurrection destroyed the power of sin and death and made it possible for us to have eternal life. That is the Good News. All faith flows from faith in the resurrection. "If Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, is your faith." (1 Corinthians 15:14)

The word "Easter" comes from Old English, meaning the "East." The sun, which rises in the East, is a symbol for Christians of the rising Christ, who is the true Light of the world. The Paschal Candle is a key symbol of this divine light, which is Christ. It is kept near the ambo throughout the Easter Season and lit for all liturgical celebrations.

faithful of Ikot Ekpene Diocese gathered at the prestigious Queen of Apostles Seminary Afaha Obong for the first ever General Assembly of the Diocese, convoked by the Bishop, Most Rev Camillus Raymond Umoh, with the theme, "Reconciliation and Renewal of Service". That Assembly called for in-depth conversion and reconciliation among the clergy and the laity towards building a diocese, defined by peace, unity and progress.

The pastoral ingenuity of His Lordship, Most Rev. Camillus Umoh has brought about development in the Pastoral, spiritual, social, education and the health sectors. For the past ten years the Diocese has grown pastorally through the direction of the Bishop. Spiritual retreats are consistently conducted annually for the clergy and the laity. The annual pilgrimage has come to stay. These energize the faithful pastorally and spiritually to face the onerous task of building the Catholic faith in the midst of strong Protestantism.

No fewer than eight (8) Parishes have been created and some Quasi Parishes elevated to full fledge parishes.

To enhance the pastoral and spiritual growth of the faithful, the Bishop opened the doors of the Diocese to more religious congregations to come and collaborate in the evangelizing mission of the Church. The Hospitaller Sisters of mercy came into Urua Akpan to assist in the Hospital there, the Daughters of St. Joseph were brought to St. Joseph Okon and they are consistent in their apostolate within the axis. The year 2023 saw the coming of the Missionary Society of St Paul, MSP and the Society of St Paul (Paulines) begin their apostolate in the Diocese

Within this period, there has been steady transition and inclusion of the lay apostolate in the Diocese.

Catholic hospitals in the Diocese have not only been given first lifts but also management expertise that makes the hospitals a much sort after health institutions. The Camillus Etukudoh School of Health Technology located in the premises of St. Mary Hospital Urua Akpan had kicked started in earnest and is churning out qualified health technicians.

Catholic schools have become first choice institutions for the education of the young. The Holy Child Girls Secondary School, Ifuho which was moribund, thanks to government poor

management of the institution, has gotten wonderful face lift and is fully on track, awake to her fundamental responsibility of raising intellectually and morally upright young women for the church and the society.

The financial administration for the Diocese has been so well standardized such that parishes and institutions must operate within approved budget, thereby ensuring accountability in all financial sectors.

The retreat centre which was inaugurated at the Golden Jubilee celebration in 2013 is now nearing completion and has already hosted many retreat, conferences and seminars, even as it prepare to host the Catholic Conference Bishop of Nigeria come 2025. The second diocesan synod which was convoked by the bishop in May, 2023 was the high point of the pastoral and spiritual journey of the clergy and the faithful with their bishop. That synod would define in the words of the Bishop, "the Diocese that will be handed over to the next generation."

The journey of Ikot Ekpene diocese from 50 to 60 is a journey of progress, development and upliftment. It is a journey of faith, not without some challenges. We recall the challenges of insecurity that engulfs some part of the diocese between 2020 and 2021, such as Ifa Nkari boundary dispute that brought about the mayhem that drove people away from the area; the Inem cult challenges that was characterized by kidnapping and killing which instilled great fear in the worshippers; and the Essien Udim carnage that literally closed down Uwa ACC. We recall the kidnapping of our priests during this period and some of our lay faithful. All these came to challenge the peaceful journey of the Diocese in the past years. But they also proved the faith of a Church in the midst of Challenges.

Despite these challenges, Ikot Ekpene Diocese continues waxing strong pastorally, spiritually and socially. The diocese remains undaunted as it is evident in the cooperation of the clergy and the bishop, the unity of the laity under the direction of the priest in their various parishes. Such unity expresses the hope that indeed we will transmit to the next generation a faith undiluted and unadulterated.

News

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St Vincent DePaul Parish:....

future expansion. However this fear was allayed when the Clan Head of the area, His Highness Obong Michael Offong, told the commission that station was ready to purchase a new spacious land where the church would be relocated in no distant time. Chief Offong was elated by the 60th anniversary gift but called on the Bishop to stand by them in times of need.

The throng left to Ikot Obiokpon where a more spacious atmosphere was inspected without many questions from the inspectors or explanation from the beneficiaries.

Pertaining to population, the registers showed that Ikot Otu and Ikot Obiokpon have more than one hundred twenty, and one hundred and ten baptized Catholic Christians respectively. Many have been

confirmed in both stations while many still have received the sacrament of Matrimony.

Earlier, the parish priest, Very Rev. Fr. Patrick X. Ekutt, heartily welcomed the commission members to the parish. He presented to them a beautiful array of the parish and station executive members, catechists as well as his able assistant parish priests.

60th Anniversary Thanksgiving: Umoh Pours Encomium On Flock, Confers Award

By Susana Clement

The Catholic Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese, Most Rev. Camillus Umoh has poured encomium on the Clergy and the faithful of God in the Diocese for their good Catholic Christian living which they have demonstrated so well in their spiritual and day-to-day living for the past sixty years. He made this commendation recently during the Thanksgiving Mass for the conferment of an Award of Ambassadors of Communion to well deserving persons in the Diocese recently.

Being satisfied with the faith and resilient generosity of his flock, the Local Ordinary went into a "Thank You" galore for the Clergy, Religious, Laity, Political Class, Traditional Rulers as well as the entire faithful of the diocese. He pointedly

expressed gratitude to members of the Clergy and Religious, saying, they deserve much appreciation for leading the flock well in the various parishes, schools, hospitals and even within the Catholic families as well as proving wonderful allies from whom he has enjoyed unalloyed cooperation for the past sixty years.

Preaching the homily, Bishop Umoh admonished all Christians to live the life of truth, saying "If you choose a life of truth, you are going to succeed and the truth you tell will live after you". The Bishop added that everyone has a mandate, an obligation to proclaim the Good News, the Truth. Umoh emphasize that all the baptized share in this responsibility: "a responsibility of knowing the facts, giving the facts and making it known to

others without being intimidated by lies, pride, bribery and corruption". Umoh stated that it is through the proclaiming of the Good News and the Truth by our forefathers and the Missionaries that Ikot Ekpene Diocese was created on 1st March, 1963 and has continued to grow for the past sixty years. The Bishop called on all to keep proclaiming truth.

Speaking further, His Lordship mentioned that the Thanksgiving Mass is the first step to the completion phase of the Diocese's 60th anniversary celebration. He said that through the selection of Ambassadors of Communion in rural areas, villages, stations and parishes, many have come to realize that the Catholic Church is important, while some have recognize the vital role of the Catholic Church in the development of the

society and teaching what others have refused to teach.

His Lordship maintained that the Catholic Church is not discriminatory, as he thanked Non-Catholics and Catholics in their generosity, sharing in the joy of the diocese and being really ambassadors of communion: "Communion means sharing, sharing in the risen Lord. Communion also means participation, participating in the work of God and participation in the work of the Church, the work in which Christ started" Umoh added.

Bishop Umoh further expressed his gratitude to all who made and are still making huge sacrificial donations towards the

completion of the Retreat Centre, Nko. He thanked in a special way those who stood out to be different in helping others and the church for better growth of the diocese.

The Chairman Planning Committee, Rev. Fr. Columbus Archibong thanked the Local Ordinary, Priests and Religious, the Laity and the Awardees for honoring the invitation. He thanked everyone for loving the church and working tirelessly for the mission of Christ on earth, the Church and the diocese at large. Fr. Archibong noted that the award is given to appreciate them for all they have been doing for the benefit of their local church

The event which took place at the St. Anne Cathedral Ifuho witnessed the gathering of many Catholics and Non-Catholics in their numbers to receive God blessings. The award was given to individuals who have contributed in no small way to the growth and success of their Parishes and the Diocese at large.

Present at the event were; Hon. Patrick Umoh, member representing the Ikot Ekpene, Essien Udim, Obot Akara at the House of Representatives; Sen. Emmanuel Ibok Essien, Sen. Chris Ekpeyong, Obong M. A. Afangideh, Traditional Rulers, Chiefs and other dignitaries.

Palm Sunday Celebration, Fr Chris Umoh Harps On Humility

By Susana Clement

As the Faithful of St. Anne Cathedral Ifuho joined others across the world to mark the great solemnity of Palm Sunday with procession and fanfare, a call has been made to embrace humility in serving God and in our daily lives. This call was contained in a homily delivered by the Cathedral Administrator, Very Rev. Fr. Christopher Umoh at the celebration. Fr. Umoh charged the faithful to walk in humility in serving God and humanity, saying that palm symbolizes humility as seen in the case of Jesus when palms and branches were laid in front of him as a sign of honor and also seen in his triumphant entry into Jerusalem where he rode on an Ass to show his humility for mankind. He taught that Palm Sunday reminds us of Jesus selfless love by which he laid down his life for humanity, even as He urged all Christians to reflect on the ways which they can enthrone Jesus

in their hearts and worship him through their time gifts, talent and through their lives.

The Cathedral Administrator further mentioned that the four Gospels richly narrates the passion of Christ, and describe his triumphant entry into Jerusalem as an event filled with symbolism and deep spiritual significance. Reflecting on the readings, Fr. Umoh described the different type of people that shouted Hosanna to Jesus thus; the Disciples, the light-minded followers of Christ, the Pharisees and Scribes; those who hate good things and the Believers as well as those who received miracle and people with passionate heart, seeking God miracle.

He called on all Christians to consider the profound humility and kingship of Christ, saying that the life of Christ reveals the nature of authentic leadership and power, a leadership which serve as power that is made perfect in

weakness; adding that Christians should commit themselves anew to following the footsteps of Jesus who lead us from dead to life and from darkness to his marvelous light to serve the common good of humanity.

The feast, which is a symbolic reflection of Jesus Christ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, marks the beginning of Holy week in anticipation of Easter, which marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an important one in the celebration of the Majesty of the Jesus Christ, and the confidence of the faithful in the sonship of Jesus Christ.

The celebration began at the Generalate of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus with a procession of the faithful holding palms in their hands and singing "Hosanna to the Son of David" and marching in jubilation to the Cathedral Church to continue with the Holy Mass.

By Micheal Ayang

As the world celebrates mothers on International Mothers day, Assumption Parish Ukana joined other groups to celebrate their mothers in a unique way with the lunching of N2.5 million for the purchase of chairs for the Marian Grotto in the Parish on the first Sunday of March. Women of proven integrity came out in their numbers to thank God for life and sustainability and also prove their worth too, in kind donations in order to achieve their dream project so as to help those going for prayers private devotions.

The event began with Holy Mass. The Assistance Parish Priest, Rev. Fr Andrew Ohakwe while delivering the homily, called on all women to follow the footsteps of the Blessed Virgin Mary, saying that they should serve as role models to the young. He admonished them to "be mothers to everyone you come across with, be good wives to your husbands, good mothers

to the Church and society". Fr Andrew taught them that through them "the Church and society will continue to grow spiritually and morally". The clergyman further advised the women to desist from gossip, backbiting and other negative vices.

The week-long celebration featured among other activities, a talk delivered by Mrs. Akpabio on the topic "Menopause". The speaker took time to educate the women on the meaning of menopause, its functions, effect, symptoms and the average age it occurs thus: "Menopause is a natural part of aging and marks the end of reproductive years in women which happens at the age of 51 and sometimes in the mid 40s", she also identify some symptoms of menopause to include; heat flashes, night sweats, emotional changes, difficulty sleeping, urinary urgency and many others; these are often as a result of the hormonal changes that are

associated with pre menopausal period.

Also speaking, the C.W.O.N president, Mrs. Grace J. Uko in a key note address, thanked the Parish Priest, Very Rev. Fr. Sylvester Umoette and his assistance, Rev. Fr. Andrew Ohakwe for their consent and support toward the success of the event. Mrs. Uko extended her gratitude to the Women of the Parish for their show of love and for finding time to participate in various activities throughout the period. She pointedly appreciated the women who really prove their worth in kind donations.

The occasion witnessed some competitive events such as Bible Quiz, Fashion Parade, March Pass and other sporting activities. All the stations were represented in these events. St. Joseph Station, Ikot Ofok took the first position, while Assumption Station, Ukana Iba and Holy Family station Ikot Akpan Essang took the second and third position respectively.



URBI ET ORBI

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis

EASTER 2024

Dear brothers and sisters, Happy Easter!

Today throughout the world there resounds the message proclaimed two thousand years ago from Jerusalem: "Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, has been raised!" (Mk 16:6).

The Church relives the amazement of the women who went to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week. The tomb of Jesus had been sealed with a great stone. Today too, great stones, heavy stones, block the hopes of humanity: the stone of war, the stone of humanitarian crises, the stone of human rights violations, the stone of human trafficking, and other stones as well. Like the women disciples of Jesus, we ask one another: "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" (cf. Mk 16:3).

This is the amazing discovery of that Easter morning: the stone, the immense stone, was rolled away. The astonishment of the women is our astonishment as well: the tomb of Jesus is open and it is empty! From this, everything begins anew! A new path leads through that empty tomb: the path that none of us, but God alone, could open: the path of life in the midst of death, the path of peace in the midst of war, the path of reconciliation in the midst of hatred, the path of fraternity in the midst of hostility.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is risen! He alone has the power to roll away the stones that block the path to life. He, the living One, is himself that path. He is the Way: the way that leads to life, the way of peace, reconciliation and fraternity. He opens that path, humanly impossible, because he alone takes away the sin of the world and forgives us our sins. For without God's forgiveness, that stone cannot be removed. Without the forgiveness of sins, there is no overcoming the barriers of prejudice, mutual recrimination, the presumption that we are always right and others wrong. Only the risen Christ, by granting us the forgiveness of our sins, opens the way for a renewed world.

Jesus alone opens up before us the doors of life, those doors that continually we shut with the wars spreading throughout the world. Today we want, first and foremost, to turn our eyes to the Holy City of Jerusalem, that witnessed the mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, and to all the Christian communities of the Holy Land.

My thoughts go especially to the victims of the many conflicts worldwide, beginning with those in Israel and Palestine, and in Ukraine. May the risen

Christ open a path of peace for the war-torn peoples of those regions. In calling for respect for the principles of international law, I express my hope for a general exchange of all prisoners between Russia and Ukraine: all for the sake of all!

I appeal once again that access to humanitarian aid be ensured to Gaza, and call once more for the prompt release of the hostages seized on 7 October last and for an immediate cease-fire in the Strip.

Let us not allow the current hostilities to continue to have grave repercussions on the civil population, by now at the limit of its endurance, and above all on the children. How much suffering we see in the eyes of the children: the children in those lands at war have forgotten how to smile! With those eyes, they ask us: Why? Why all this death? Why all this destruction? War is always an absurdity, war is always a defeat! Let us not allow the strengthening winds of war to blow on Europe and the Mediterranean. Let us not yield to the logic of weapons and rearming. Peace is never made with arms, but with outstretched hands and open hearts.

Brothers and sisters, let us not forget Syria, which for thirteen years has suffered from the effects of a long and devastating war. So many deaths and disappearances, so much poverty and destruction, call for a response on the part of everyone, and of the international community.

My thoughts turn today in a special way to Lebanon, which has for some time experienced institutional impasse and a deepening economic and social crisis, now aggravated by the hostilities on its border with Israel. May the Risen Lord console the beloved Lebanese people and sustain the entire country in its vocation to be a land of encounter, coexistence and pluralism.

I also think in particular of the region of the Western Balkans, where significant steps are being taken towards integration in the European project. May ethnic, cultural and confessional differences not be a cause of division, but rather a source of enrichment for all of Europe and for the world as a whole.

I likewise encourage the discussions taking place between Armenia and Azerbaijan, so that, with the support of the international community, they can pursue dialogue, assist the displaced, respect the places of worship of the various religious confessions, and arrive as soon as possible at a definitive peace agreement.

May the risen Christ open a path of hope to all those who in other parts of the world are suffering from violence, conflict, food insecurity and the effects of climate change. May the Lord grant consolation to the victims of terrorism in all its forms. Let us pray for all those who have lost their lives and implore the

repentance and conversion of the perpetrators of those crimes.

May the risen Lord assist the Haitian people, so that there can soon be an end to the acts of violence, devastation and bloodshed in that country, and that it can advance on the path to democracy and fraternity.

May Christ grant consolation and strength to the Rohingya, beset by a grave humanitarian crisis, and open a path to reconciliation in Myanmar, torn for years now by internal conflicts, so that every logic of violence may be definitively abandoned.

May the Lord open paths of peace on the African continent, especially for the suffering peoples in Sudan and in the entire region of the Sahel, in the Horn of Africa, in the region of Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the province of Capo Delgado in Mozambique, and bring an end to the prolonged situation of drought which affects vast areas and provokes famine and hunger.

May the Risen One make the light of his face shine upon migrants and on all those who are passing through a period of economic difficulty, and offer them consolation and hope in their moment of need. May Christ guide all persons of good will to unite themselves in solidarity, in order to address together the many challenges which loom over the poorest families in their search for a better life and happiness.

On this day when we celebrate the life given us in the resurrection of the Son, let us remember the infinite love of God for each of us: a love that overcomes every limit and every weakness. And yet how much the precious gift of life is despised! How many children cannot even be born? How many die of hunger and are deprived of essential care or are victims of abuse and violence? How many lives are made objects of trafficking for the increasing commerce in human beings?

Brothers and sisters, on the day when Christ has set us free from the slavery of death, I appeal to all who have political responsibilities to spare no efforts in combating the scourge of human trafficking, by working tirelessly to dismantle the networks of exploitation and to bring freedom to those who are their victims. May the Lord comfort their families, above all those who anxiously await news of their loved ones, and ensure them comfort and hope.

May the light of the resurrection illumine our minds and convert our hearts, and make us aware of the value of every human life, which must be welcomed, protected and loved

A happy Easter to all!

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