



“THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME, FOR HE ANOINTED ME. HE HAS SENT ME TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR...” (Lk 4:18)

Address of His Lordship, Most Rev. Jonas Benson Okoye on His Installation as the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Nnewi on February 10, 2022 at Our Lady of Assumption Cathedral, Nnewi, Anambra State, Nigeria

**Your Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja Archdiocese
The Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi
Your Grace, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria
Your Grace, Archbishop Valerian Maduka Okeke, the Archbishop of Onitsha and the Metropolitan of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province
Your Excellencies, the Archbishops, and Bishops
Your Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan, Former President of Nigeria
Your Excellency, the Governor of Anambra State, Chief Dr. Willie Obiano
Your Excellency, Mr. Peter Obi CON, the immediate past Governor of Anambra State
Prof. Charles Soludo, the Governor-Elect of Anambra State
Provincial Superiors and Superior Generals
The Secretary General and Staff of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria
Rt. Rev. and Very Rev. Msgri., Rev. Frs.,
Consecrated men and women of the various Religious Orders, Seminarians
Other Governors, Distinguished Senators, Commissioners and Government Officials
Chief Dr. Cletus Ibeto, the Chairman of today's occasion
Igwe Kenneth Onyeneke Orizu III, Igwe of Nnewi Kingdom
All Traditional Rulers
Knights of the Church and their Ladies
C. M. O.; C. W. O.; C.Y.O.N.; C.B.O.; C.G.O.; H.C.A.
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,**

Personal Experience

Ofu aka anaghi eke ngwugwu. A bundle cannot be fastened with one hand. No matter how self-sufficient a person might feel, it is not possible to achieve anything without the support of others. I do not think that I would be able in a short moment like this to express how I feel for the enormous sacrifices you have all made, both individually and collectively, for the success of today's event.

On the 30th of May 2014 when the Holy Father, Pope Francis, announced my appointment as the Titular Bishop of Masclianae and the Auxiliary Bishop of Awka, I was greeted with numerous

calls and text messages. I still remember vividly how greatly humbled I felt. I never imagined that such a moment would come again in my life when I feel overwhelmed by a plethora of good wishes. But the moment came again on Tuesday, 9th November 2021, when Pope Francis, in the 9th year of his Pontificate, appointed me the second bishop of Nnewi Diocese. The palpable joy that resonated among the priests, religious men and women, and the lay faithful, the subsequent phone calls and many gestures of goodwill made me feel so honored and humbled. There was also the mixed feeling of trepidation and assurance. Trepidation because of the expressions of high expectations, but I became confident because of the assurances of support that many have expressed and still express. Nothing could be more assuring than to see all of you gathered here today pray with me and for me as I begin my new ministry as the Bishop of Nnewi.

I have experienced an amazing grace of consolation in the fact that the Lord has called me in spite of my imperfections to succeed Most Rev. Hilary Odili Okeke, Nnaora. But in many ways, the Lord has made me aware of His abiding presence, and has invited me to participate in His ministry in a new and more challenging way. And I entrust myself entirely to Him.

Gratitude

I thank the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for appointing me the second bishop of Nnewi diocese, a diocese richly endowed with many spiritual and human blessings. I remain greatly indebted to the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, His Excellency, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi, who, on behalf of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, presided over my installation today as the substantive bishop of Nnewi diocese. I thank him also for the beautiful homily he shared with us in this celebration. In many conversations with my brother-bishops, we have expressed our delight and gratitude for your diligence and the wisdom with which you carry out your task within and for the Church in Nigeria.

I thank Francis Cardinal Arinze for his note of felicitation. The presence of His Eminence John Cardinal Onaiyekan in our midst is most edifying, as always. The Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland and our own son and brother, Most Rev. Jude Thaddeus Okolo desired so much to be with us today save for another urgent call to duty. He sent his greetings and congratulatory message. I remain greatly indebted to the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, His Grace Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze, he was here on the 21st of January and delivered the homily at the Thanksgiving Mass of the 75th birthday of Bishop Hilary Odili Okeke. I salute my Provincial, Most Rev. Valerian Maduka Okeke, who continues to offer us exemplary leadership and princely benefaction. Your Graces and Lordships here present, in many and diverse ways, you have supported and encouraged me in these years of my life and ministry as bishop. I have learnt and hope to still learn a lot of good lessons from you all.

I turn now to my predecessor, our Bishop Emeritus, Most Rev. Hilary Paul Odili Okeke who was my teacher at the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Port Harcourt, and has remained a true guide as a professional colleague in canonical issues and discourses. Thank you for your fruitful labours as the first bishop of this diocese. You laboured for two decades building this "family of God," to use a phrase that is fundamental in your vision of ministry in the Church. Indeed, you are Nnaora! It would be difficult to chronicle in detail the different segments of the solid foundation you laid in the diocese. May God reward you most abundantly! I would also like to thank Bishop Paulinus Chukwuemeka Ezeokafor, the Catholic Bishop of Awka Diocese, under whose tutelage I began my ministry as a bishop, and served for almost eight years as an Auxiliary Bishop. I am grateful for our works together.

I recognize and cherish the presence of the Secretary General and staff of the Catholic Secretariat, and the members of the Canon Law Society of Nigeria who have traveled from all over the country to be here. I thank you all with my heart and soul. I remain united with you, my brother priests of Nnewi Diocese, of Awka and Ekwulobia Dioceses, and those of our Province and beyond. I am always conscious of the fact that we are bonded by one common and unique fraternity. *Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum, habitare fratres in unum* (Ps 133:1).

I am grateful for the honorable presence of the immediate past President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who has been with us since yesterday. Your acceptance speech after the election that went the way it did in 2015 has remained an inspiration to many; recalling those words of yours that “nobody's ambition is worth the blood of any Nigerian.” I wish subsequent leaders will emulate that good example of yours.

I thank the Governor of Anambra State, His Excellency Dr. Willie Obiano for being present at my Episcopal consecration in 2014 and here today for this installation ceremony. I appreciate immensely your kind support in very many ways towards the success of this day. Thanks to the Anambra International Airport, our visitors didn't have to suffer the stress of traversing the head bridge nor the difficulty in plying the collapsed Enugu-Onitsha expressway. Your Excellency, someday, you will be better celebrated for your kindheartedness and your good works in our State.

The Governor-Elect, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo is here with us. Already we are beginning to feel the impact of the way his administration will go. You would have noticed that I didn't address him as His Excellency, because he has said that the “Excellency” will have to wait until the end of his tenure when the people would adjudge if he is qualified to bear that title. We pray for you, for the wisdom and strength you need to carry out the task of working entirely for the well-being of our people. I am grateful to you, the immediate past Governor of Anambra State, Sir Peter Gregory Obi CON, for your inspiring life and continuous service to humanity. Your support all these years would be difficult to be tabulated here. May your strength not fail!

You, my beloved Lay Faithful of Nnewi and all the people of God gathered here today, you are the joy and hope, the life and vitality of the Church. To each and every one of you I owe what I am today, and I humbly acknowledge your unflinching support. Some supported me even far beyond the strength of their financial and affordable comfort. Let me mention specifically Chief Cletus Ibeto who accepted to be the Chairman of today's occasion and his disposition to be of assistance any time he is called upon. We all witnessed what happened at the gala night yesterday that began with a tour of Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing company, and the warm reception and generosity of Chief Innocent Chukwuma to the Bishops. I am already thinking of how the diocese would partner with his company to build a Hub or an Institute of Industry and Technological Skills where our teaming gifted youths will learn different skills and hone their great talents in order to become better engaged and more useful to themselves and our society.

I thank my old-time friend, Chief Sir Dr. Ikenna Okafor for his support all these years; he provided all the Mitres and Chasubles the Bishops are wearing in this Holy Mass, all of them from the Eternal City of Rome. An amiable young man in our midst, Hon. Dozie Nwankwo paid for the air tickets to and fro for all the bishops who flew in from Abuja and Lagos. A special mention must be made of Chief/Iyom Ven and Amaka Muoghalu for the provision of the Bishop's Throne Chair so well carved and designed. I recall the generous assistance of Prof. Pauline Flynn of the Diocese of Fort Wayne South Bend in faraway United States of America. I salute Chief Mrs. Doris Nwankwo for travelling all the way from the USA to be with us, so also

Dr. Sir J.K. Okoye who had to break his vacation in England to be with us today. A special gratitude goes to our in-law Chief Sir J.J. Ezekafor (JEZCO Group of Companies) for all his unending supports.

My very numerous friends, Engr. Sir Edward Dijeh, Chief P.A. Okonkwo (Eze Oji), Chief Sir Augustine Ibeme, Chief Sir Patrick Chidolue, Chief Sir Joseph Ikem Odumodu, Chief Sir Victor Umeh, Chief Dr. Victor Ike Oye, Sir Ignatius Okeke for their many sacrifices in the past and now.

I recognize the efforts of the Vice Chairman Diocesan Pastoral Council in the person of Nze Sullivan Nwakpo. He facilitated the logistics for having the former president of the country in our midst to grace this occasion. I thank the Installation Planning Committee led by Hon. Chief Patrick Ubajaka. We all present here are witnesses of a beautiful liturgy and an organizational competence. Indeed, members of the committee galvanized all available resources to make today's event a memorable one. Of course, the members of the Episcopal household have been busy and extraordinarily committed. I guess by the evening of today, they would be able to catch some sleep. Thank you, my dear brothers and sisters.

The Lord has Sent me to Bring Good News to the Poor

My dear brother-priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful of Nnewi, at the time of my appointment, as in every other age, many people in many parts of the globe were and are still having very difficult experiences. The experiences range from the global health crisis as a result of the outbreak of the corona virus, to political instability, social upheavals, and economic hardships. Then there was and still there is the menace of insecurity, terrorism and senseless killings in most parts of the world, and particularly in our country Nigeria where we have the militancy in the South-South; the kidnappings and brutality of the unknown gunmen in the South-East; the Boko Haram in the North-East, North-West and parts of North-Central; the herdsmen menace in the South-West; not to mention the negative consequences of failed politics and governance in most parts of the country. Unfortunately, this social malaise has not abated, but on the contrary has assumed new and different dimensions.

For us, the ministers of the Gospel of salvation, and for me in particular, these horrendous events move me to keep reflecting deeply on what we can do as a Church in response to these, so that our people may have and live life and do so abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10). These were the reflections and the longing that inspired the choice of my Episcopalmotto "Gaudium et Spes" (Joy and hope). As the new Bishop of Nnewi Diocese, I feel greatly obliged more than ever, and together with my brother-priests, consecrated men and women and the lay faithful to seek new ways and methods of sharing the good news of joy and hope, of improving the lives of our people, especially the victims of injustice and marginalization. To remain committed to this vision of joy and hope amongst our people, I earnestly need your prayers and support.

As we begin this phase of our life as a diocese, I would want us to always remember the perennial task of the Church – bringing the Good News to the poor. What we must do is to adapt this perennial task to our context, by becoming all things to all men and women so that by all possible means we might save many and lead them to faith in Christ (1 Cor 9:22).

Jesus Christ Himself, the Good News of salvation, the Word of God made incarnate, articulated his ministry in these words from the Prophet Isaiah: "the Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord." He concluded by saying that "this text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening." (Lk 4:18, 21).

These words of Jesus about bringing the good news to the poor and giving sight to the blind have been hijacked by some Church leaders. These set themselves up as 'power-full,' that is, as individuals with 'excess spiritual powers.' By setting up a network of those who give 'testimonies' they plant themselves in the imagination of the gullible as capable of smelling out those stalling the progress of others; and through words of command 'in the name of Jesus' magically making an unemployable poor person rich even in a depressed economy and miraculously healing all diseases. The result is the fostering in our people a magical mentality which is often confused with faith, and the undermining of the Gospel message itself.

There is so much brokenness, frustration, hopelessness, and helplessness in our country. Jesus continues to challenge his disciples, "give them something yourself to eat" (Matt 14:16). But we are challenged by the Prophet Isaiah not to spend our energy on what is not bread or give them what does not satisfy (Is 55:2). Ours is the task of guiding our people through the mental fog created by the dehumanizing situation we find ourselves. I believe in miracles, and I have experienced miracles in my life. But we must resist the temptation of oversimplification and mystification of socio-economic processes to putatively project the omnipotence of God. Why are there more jobs than seekers in some countries while in ours it is the other way round? Does it mean that God loves people in those parts of the world where most of the people can afford decent livelihood more than God loves us? Did they arrive at that stage of development through vigils at prayer centres? I do not think so.

Jesus asked for the available loaves of bread and fish for the miracle of the multiplication of loaves (Mk 6:38). He also turned to wine only the amount of water that had been fetched by the servants (Jn 2:7). Even the fact that God took human flesh in Jesus Christ for us and for our salvation shows us that God decided to associate human beings with Himself in His plan of granting salvation to humanity. Quality human agency is indispensable. That is why quality education and human formation, and by extension, a conducive socio-political and cultural environment constitute the *conditio sine qua non* for a better future for our people. God will not come down to do these for us. They are the five loaves and the buckets of water that God wants us to bring for our miracle.

As diocese, as families and communities, we must step up our pastoral cum social engagement, especially in the areas of agriculture, entrepreneurship, technical innovation etc. so that we can present to God, through his Word made flesh, the fruits of our labours – spiritual, moral, manual, intellectual, organizational, etc – for the Holy Spirit to energize for our liberation from our self-imposed prisons, our healing from blindness, and for emergence from the mud we have sunk into. Seeing the industrial nature of this Diocese, I am already considering the possibility of building a University of Technology and Nnewi Business School where our teaming talented and gifted youths would be properly groomed, given the means, opportunities and power to order their lives, grow their potentials, and thus shape their future for good.

The Church: A Family of Life and Love, of Hope and Joy

The family is the first school of faith and morals that children go to. In other words, the family leaves its mark on the child for good or ill. It never stops to amaze me how much God trusts parents. God hands over to them a brand-new human being to mold. Sometimes they do a fairly good job and at other times, they botch it. Presently, many parents have sub-contracted the task of the formation of their wards to nannies and teachers so that they can have enough time to attend to the economic needs of the family or to pursue their careers. How would we in our diocese reach out and support parents in their God given, difficult and delicate task of children upbringing? This is a concern we must find ways and means of focusing on. We shall deploy

whatever resources needed to make our contribution as Church because the future of the Church and of the society is tied to this.

The first task of the Church in our present circumstances is to be a beacon of hope. The expectation of a better tomorrow is an expression of hope. This alone is grossly inadequate. As Christians, our hope is grounded on the fact that God is actively involved in our lives and in the world. However thick the darkness, the light of Christ has triumphed; however heavy the chain of bondage, our liberation has been achieved in Christ. What is required is for us Christians to embody the light of Christ, daily pushing forth into the domain of darkness confident that the battle is the Lord's (2 Chron. 20:15) and that we are never alone because God is fighting alongside, and victory is assured. Such a hope helps us to stay engaged, doing the good we know, refusing to cut corners or giving in to double standards because we know that God counts on us for our life on earth to approximate His kingdom.

This is a joy that swells up from deep within. It is not a joy that comes from *mkpụrụmmiri* or any other substance. It is a joy of a different quality from the tendency of Nigerians to make a joke out of every hardship, "suffering and smiling." Rather, it is the joy of martyrs, who in spite of the dire threat to their lives, and the physical and emotional pain their commitments bring them to, remain joyful because they know that it is for a higher purpose. So, our challenge as Church is to become martyrs and to produce martyrs. We may not be required to shed our blood but to be steadfast in our commitment to the good, accountability, the true, the beautiful, making the needed sacrifices for their propagation and preservation in the awareness that God is at work in and through us and would bring about a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1); a new Nigeria or new Biafra(whichever) at God's own time because He is the Lord of history.

Community Service

It is unfortunate that the triumph of the market economy has transformed our values. Gone are the days when children are taught to look for opportunities to help others. Presently, people in need often face a barrage of cameras transmitting their difficulty on social media or people who haggle for the payment they will receive if they help. In sum, the spirit of community service is dying or has died. We need to revive it. It is interesting that despite its capitalism and touted individualism, children in the United States of America are encouraged to engage in community service. From childhood, they are taught that it is important to contribute to the good of the community. As Africans, we pride ourselves on our communal living. Yet people no longer see that their well being as individuals is dependent on the well being of the community. Rather, people privilege the satisfaction of their needs, even if at the detriment of the community. We must find a way of forming our people and making more people realize the truth of the saying: "I am because we are." Unless what affects all is cared for, the effort of individuals to protect themselves as individuals would always fall short. In the long run, this formation may bring out a crop of people who would be sensitive and committed to public good and not simply to themselves at the detriment of every other person.

Concluding Reflection

My dear brothers and sisters, ours is the God of history who arranges things according to His providence. I have gathered myself and I know that God has His purpose for me and for all of us as a diocesan family. We want to further that purpose. I see myself as a servant of God's purpose and a servant of God's people. My first task as the diocesan bishop is to journey along with the diocesan family as a Synodal Church, a church in which all see themselves as "journeying together," and with the rest of the humanity. It is my prayer and hope that myself, all the priests, the consecrated persons and the lay faithful would learn to listen to ourselves and to one another with our hearts and to the Holy Spirit; that we take seriously the fact that through

baptism all are called to participate in the one mission of Christ and to bear witness to God's love in all we do.

As a concrete way of demonstrating my avowed commitment to hearken to the yearnings of your hearts', I would like in a special way to thank Hon. Chief Senator Ifeanyi Ubah for the immense sacrifices he has made with his resources, time and energy in assisting to build this Cathedral Church up to this point. Even the blind would acknowledge that he has put in so much. Knowing too well how the completion of this Cathedral has remained the worry of Nnaora, the priest, religious men and women and the entire faithful because of the several calls and text messages I have received urging me to ensure that this Cathedral be completed in a record time; I hereby appoint Rev. Fr. to supervise with me the construction of this Cathedral until it is dedicated.

I have also felt the pulse of my predecessor regarding the building of some schools to ensure that our young ones enjoy quality, integral formation and education. He has also worked hard to build the priests' center for retired priests and priests who wish to have some time off. In pursuit of this project Nnaora has, for the past five years, committed the funds donated to him at his birthday to the project. So, in the bid to bring this dream to fruition, I hereby appoint the following priests as chaplain and supervisors of the following projects he initiated and see to its completion.

i. Chaplain, Blessed Iwene Tansi Priests' Centre, Nnewi – Rev. Fr.

The project coordinators for the schools are:

ii. St. Patrick College, Nnewi – Rev. Fr.

iii. Queen of the Rosary College, Amichi – Rev. Fr.

iv. Assumption Seminary School, Okija – Rev. Fr.

Finally, I am pleading with the priests, religious men and women, catechists, lay faithful of our diocese, and all people of goodwill to study carefully this year's Lenten Pastoral Letter entitled "Family of Joy and Hope: Together in Faith, Let us Build God's Church." Use it for the Sunday evening instructions this coming Lenten Season and possibly for School Quiz competitions. An in-depth study of it will further indicate the orientation of our collective mission and purpose as diocesan family.

May God assist us as a diocesan family to live out this vision of bringing the Good News of joy and hope to the poor, of setting captives free, and of opening the eyes of the blind in the complex circumstances of our times. May our mother Mary Our Lady of Assumption under whose maternal care this Cathedral is placed watch over us all. May she remain your perpetual help and guiding star as you return to your various destinations.

Once again, thank you for your generous presence and kind attention.

† Jonas Benson OKOYE

Bishop of Nnewi