



CARDINAL ONAIYEKAN LAUDS THE GROWTH OF CATHOLICISM IN THE NORTH

May 12, 2017

JOS, NIGERIA -

The growth of the Catholic Church in the Northern part of the country in the last 50 years has been described as commendable and encouraging, in spite of the challenges encountered by the Church in the region.

The commendation was given by the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja Archdiocese, John Cardinal Onaiyekan at the Golden Jubilee celebration Thanksgiving Mass of St Augustine's Seminary, Jos, held recently at the premises of the institution, in Jos, Plateau State. According to him the notable growth is not in respect of number of faithful alone but also in the depth of the faith.

His words: "The growth of the church in these parts since the last 50 years can be described as phenomenal. The increase in the population of the Catholic faithful is very visible all across the region. If there was a time when this zone used to be called "Muslim North", it is now certainly no longer so. Despite subtle and open persecution in many places, the church has continued to grow from day to day. This increase is not only in quantity of church goers but

also in the depth of faith.”

He added: “Thus, we have every cause to rejoice in the consistency and depth of the faith of our people. They keep the flag of the Catholic faith flying high as the witness courageously to the Gospel message. This cuts across all social strata, from the elite in the cities to the poor farmers in the rural villages.”

Cardinal Onaiyekan also used the occasion to appreciate the invaluable role of St Augustine Major Seminary in turning out priests that have been faithful to their vocation and lay faithful who went through the seminary training without making it to the altar, noting that they also have lived up to their responsibilities in their various callings in the service of the Church.

He declared: “Of particular relevance to the occasion we are celebrating today is what can be described as a “vocation boom” in the North during these past 50 years. We were reminded last night, and again this morning, that this seminary has produced over 100 priests – an average of 20 per annum. In addition, we must mention the over 2000 other *alumni* who did not make it to the priesthood but are zealous lay apostles out there in the many other walks of life to which Providence has directed them.”

The cardinal continued: “In the meantime, Makurdi Seminary has come on board, and Kaduna joined the league

recently. Within our life time, we have seen a development from a predominantly foreign missionary clergy to a near completely indigenous clergy. We have gone beyond to join in the missionary project of the universal church, as we have been sending an increasing number of priests and religious on mission all over the world.”

While noting that the challenge before many Vocations Directors is no longer how to attract candidates but how to screen properly the ever-growing number of applicants, Cardinal Onaiyekan emphasized the need for proper scrutiny of candidates, to ensure the maintenance of integrity and sanctity of the priestly vocation. He also used the occasion to outline the future challenges of the Church in respect of vocations and emergence of priests in the modern day world according to the signs of times.