



CALL FOR A MORE PROACTIVE PRIESTLY MINISTRY

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JOS, NIGERIA -

The Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan has called for a more proactive Catholic priestly ministry where the priest is a servant of Word and Sacrament, modest in his self-esteem and belong to his community teaching them the truth of the Catholic faith and imparting the doctrines of the Church.

Cardinal Onaiyekan made this admonition in his homily 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. The ceremony was attended by many alumni of the institution and dignitaries from all walks of life, including the Archbishop of Jos and President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama.

Noting that the occasion provides an opportunity for reappraisal of the progress of the institution and the Church in the Northern part of the country, Cardinal Onaiyekan commended the institution for its enviable role in formation and laudable success in the area of vocation adding however that there is the need to devise a new era of priestly formation.

Describing the situation as a challenge that needs to be properly addressed the cardinal declared: "If we continue business as usual in this matter, we may run the risk of stagnation and pastoral atrophy."

Cardinal Onaiyekan outlined the challenges in this perspective to include the need to move from the traditional image of the “elite Reverend Father, who is up there above the people to a new emphasis on the priest as a minister – that is, a servant – of Word and Sacrament”; pointing out that despite being learned and versatile, the priest must also be “simple and modest in his self-esteem”.

He added: “Therefore, the priest of the new era must take seriously the fact that he has been chosen from among his community and should as far as possible live with and among his people. Perhaps, this is what Pope Francis means when he says that the priest should “smell like his flock”. He should not be ashamed to acknowledge that he himself is also weak, and struggling for holiness, like other people – as the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us. (cfr Heb. 5:1-3)”.

Other challenges identified by the cardinal include paying great attention to the Ministry of the Word. His words: “We need to spend more time teaching the truths of our faith, and imparting the doctrines of our Church. How can we effectively reach the large numbers that are now flocking into our Churches? Are they able to stand their grounds when queried about the grounds of the faith that they claim to have? Sunday homilies must be well prepared. But unfortunately, this is not enough for our people to acquire an adult faith. In this regard, the vast resources of the modern means of communication and the more recent social media need to be effectively tapped, in the light of the new evangelization.

The Metropolitan of Abuja Archdiocese also noted that the ministry of the sacred Priesthood is not only to lead the

people to the “worship in spirit and truth” which the Lord Jesus demands of all (Jn 4:23); but also devise ways of taking the Eucharist to the people, in their homes, places of work, or neighbourhood worshipping groups. “Where this happens, it must of course be done with full regard to the sanctity and dignity of the sacrament”; he added

The Cardinal continued: “The priest of the future needs to be trained for collaborative ministry. He should abhor being a lone ranger. He should enjoy working with others, be they brother priests, religious or laity. It means creating room for others to perform, according to the gifts which God has given to each person. Without clericalizing the laity, we must find ever better ways to bring them into the general mission and apostolate of the church, not as merely assistants and surrogates but as true associates and co-workers in the vineyard,”

In conclusion, Cardinal Onaiyekan stressed the need to take the spirit of collaboration beyond the confines of our church community. He declared: “With the complexity of the religious demography in our nation, and the ever-increasing conflicts across our ethnic and other diversity fault-lines, reaching out to others has become not an option but an imperative.” According to him: “The priest must be in the front line of building bridges across religious difference – and resist the temptation to become sectional warlords.”