



Pope Francis Sends Condolences for Attack on Church in Nigeria

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VATICAN CITY -

The Pope is “deeply saddened” for the victims of the “violent attack” that took place in the Catholic Church of St. Philip in Ozubulu, Anambra State, in southern Nigeria yesterday, Sunday, August 6, 2017.

During morning Mass, at least 12 lives were claimed and many wounded among hundreds present. Sources report the cause was organized crime, tied to drugs.

In a telegram the Pope had sent on his behalf today by Vatican Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin, he “extends his sincere condolences” to Bishop Hilary Paul Odili Okeke, Bishop of Nnewi, “and to all the faithful of the Diocese of Nnewi, especially to the families of the deceased and to all those affected by this tragedy.”

In the telegram, the Pontiff invoked “the divine blessings of consolation and strength” on the whole diocese.

According to the investigations to date, the tragedy is due to tribal revenge and not to terrorism, in this diocese of southeast Nigeria, populated mainly by Christians, like all the south of the country.

According to the Vatican missionary agency *Fides*, “the target of the murderers was Aloysius Ikegwonu, a major drug trafficker who gained enormous sums in South Africa where he controlled an active band in the distribution of cocaine.” The assassins were former accomplices who accused him of stealing most of the proceeds from the sale of drugs.

“Aloysius Ikegwonu had organized a sort of thank-you ceremony in St. Philip’s Church,” the source added, “but at the last moment, he had been warned that the group of his former accomplices had planned to attack him. He therefore avoided going to church. The group of killers entered the church and, not finding him, killed the father of

Aloysius Ikegwuonu and the people around him, thinking that they were members of the family.”