



CATHOLICS URGED TO LEARN FROM MARY TO OBTAIN DIVINE FAVOURS

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BENIN CITY, NIGERIA -

Catholic faithful have been called upon to dedicate themselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary whose intercession will impact positively on their lives with divine favours. The admonition was made by the Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha Archdiocese, Most Rev. Valerian Okeke, in his homily at the celebration of the Mass for the re-consecration of Nigeria to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria and Archbishop of Jos, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama was the chief celebrant at the Mass.

Archbishop Okeke described the Blessed Virgin Mary as a woman of many virtues whose intercession has obtained graces from God for humanity and helped to overcome difficulties. The Mass was the climax of the three-day Prayer Pilgrimage celebration to mark the end of the country's third National Marian Congress and was held at the grounds of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH); Benin City, Edo State.

The ceremony also marked the culmination of the country's celebration of the Jubilee Year to mark the Centenary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the three shepherd children at Fatima, Portugal, declared by the Holy Father Pope Francis, from November 27th to November 26th 2017. It was attended by about 53 members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria including John Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja and Anthony Cardinal Okogie, the emeritus Archbishop of Lagos Archdiocese and Archbishop Patrick Eboseli Ekpu, emeritus Archbishop of Benin City.

Also in attendance were: the Charge de Affairs at the Apostolic Nunciature, Msgr Javier D Fernandes G, who represented the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filippazi; the Governor of Edo State, Mr. Godwin Obaseki , his deputy, Mr. Philip Shuaibu, and and their wives; as well as other government functionaries, about 800 priest, over 1,000 Rev Sisters and about forty thousand lay faithful from all parts of the country.

While urging the pilgrims to pray devotedly to the Mother of Christ, the Local Ordinary of Onitsha Archdiocese gave ten reasons why he loves the Mother of the Saviour of the world. Using Biblical references to buttress his points, Archbishop Okeke stated that God came to us through Mary; so, we can go back to God through Mary (Heb 1:1ff); who is also an Epiphany – visible manifestation of a divine being, which is the manifestation of God who is Spirit and invincible (Gal.4:4).

The homilist continued: “Mary is full of grace (Luke1:28); and she can obtain grace for us. She has found favour with God and can obtain favour for us because man without grace is grass; and without God’s grace, we can do nothing (John 15;5).” He added that Mary effectively intercedes for us and her intercession never fails (John2: 1-11). Other virtues of the Blessed Virgin the Archbishop outlined included: Mary’s special ‘connection’ with the Blessed Trinity. He said: “She is a special Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son and beloved spouse of the Holy Spirit”. He stressed that by this grace, Mary can bring us closer to God. He added that, as a mother, Mary searches for and finds her lost child (Luke2:46). His words: “If you are truly Mary’s child, Mary searches for you. You may NEVER be lost.”

Archbishop Okeke further contended: “Mary as Mother and Queen of peace gave birth to the Prince of Peace – Christ who is Peace himself.” He also extolled her love for the Scriptures “as she lives and leverages on the Scriptures”. Archbishop Okeke added that Mary is the Mother of mercy and her Son is a true revelation of God’s mercy; and as a woman of gratitude, the more she received grace, the more she gave thanks; the more she gave thanks, the more her favours increased.

Urging the pilgrims to emulate Mother Mary and live a virtuous life, Archbishop Okeke stated that gratitude increases miracles and therefore; "If you truly want divine favours, learn from Mary." He concluded: "Therefore, take Mary home as your Mother and your life will change. It will never remain the same and you cannot be lost, because children of Mary are never lost, never ashamed and cannot be killed by any Herod."