



FRATERNAL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH A DIVINE GIFT OF GOD - CBCN President

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BOMADI, NIGERIA -

The fraternal communion of the Catholic Church is a divine gift of God which makes her different from other denominations and Catholics are known for remaining united under the Apostolic and pastoral leadership of the Holy Father the Pope; the Catholic Archbishop of Jos and President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama has declared.

This assertion was contained in the homily of the Archbishop at the celebration of the Mass on the occasion of the canonical erection of the Catholic Diocese of Bomadi and the installation of Most Rev. Hyacinth Oroko Egbebo as its Bishop. The ceremony which took place recently at the Our Lady of the Waters Cathedral, Bomadi, Delta State, was performed by the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filippazi.

According to the CBCN President: “We are proudly and happily Catholic and our strength lies in our diversity which is a gift of God. We try our best not to fall into the temptation of parochialism, ethnocentrism or exclusion.” The ceremony was attended by members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, government functionaries, dignitaries from all walks of life, priests, religious and Catholic lay faithful from within and outside the country.

To buttress his point the Archbishop continued: “Recently, many Catholic Bishops were in Maiduguri to celebrate the success of mission work during the 50th anniversary of the founding of the diocese. We witnessed the vibrancy of faith and the joy of the faithful who even in the midst of Boko Haram attacks continue to exhibit incredible faith, which goes to show that nothing can separate the people from the love of Jesus Christ (cf. Rm 8:34-35).”

He added: “It is in our DNA as Catholics to show fraternal communion which is why we

the Bishops, priests, religious and laity from different parts of the country are here to express our solidarity with you in Bomadi and to assure you that we are one big family in Nigeria on mission. Though tribe and tongue may differ in the Catholic Church, we try to remedy this “tower of babel” reality. We encourage ourselves to speak the common language of faith because we have one Lord, one faith one father and Lord of all Eph 4:4-6 The waters of baptism should be thicker than the blood of tribe or cultural affiliation.”

Archbishop Kaigama went down memory lane to speak on the importance of Benin Ecclesiastical Province in the life of the Church in the country as well as educate the congregation on the transformation of Bomadi Vicariate to a diocese and the spiritual and pastoral expectations of the newly erected diocese His words: “The upgrading of the Apostolic Vicariate to a Diocese confers on the Diocese what I consider a threefold duty: The duty to preach the Word of God, the duty to perform more good deeds and the duty to love and unity”.

He added: “What today is Benin City Ecclesiastical Province is particularly famous in the history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria because it hosted the first Catholic Portuguese priests of the Diocese of Lisbon, Portugal in the fifteenth century (about 1472).” The

CBCN President continued: "Today, the Province made up of five dioceses is witnessing the upgrading of the Vicariate of Bomadi to the status of a full-fledged diocese. Congratulations to the people of God in the new Bomadi Diocese and to the entire Benin City Ecclesiastical Province. We appreciate your determination of faith, loyalty to the Catholic Church and your gracious, warm and cordial welcome extended to all of us at this celebration."

The ceremony was attended by members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, government functionaries and dignitaries from all walks of life from within and outside the country. The CBCN members present at the ceremony included: Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, President of the Catholic Bishops Conference and Archbishop of Jos; Archbishop Augustine Akubeze, Vice President of the Conference and Metropolitan of Benin City Ecclesiastical Province; Archbishops Anthony Obinna of Owerri and Matthew Ndagoso of Kaduna; and emeriti Archbishops Patrick Ebosele Ekpu of Benin City and Felix Alaba Job of Ibadan. Others were: Bishops Martin Uzuokwu of Minna; John Ayah of Uyo; Charles Hammawa of Jalingo; John Afareha of Warri; Michael Elue of Iselle-Uku; Gabriel Dunia of Auchu and Camillus Umoh of Ikot-Ekpene.

Also present were: Bishops Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo; Anthony Adaji *MSP* of Idah; Paulinus Ezeokafor of Awka; Augustine Ukwuoma of Orlu; Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto; Peter Okpaleke of Ahiara; Godfrey Onah of Nsukka; Donatus Ogun of Uromi; Donatus Akpan of Ogoja; Anselm Umoren, Auxiliary of Abuja; Jonas Benson Okoye, Auxiliary of Awka and Denis Isizoh, Auxiliary of Onitsha. Bishops George Dodo of Zaria and Camillus Etokudoh of Port Harcourt were represented by Very Rev. Fr. Henry Atuma and Rev. Fr. Justin Njoku respectively.

The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) delegation, led by the Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Ralph Madu included: Rev. Fr. Ojaje Idoko, Director of Pastoral Affairs and Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, Director of Social Communications. Also in attendance were: Msgr. Javier Fernandez, Counselor at the Apostolic Nunciature; Msgr. Thomas Greenan *SPS*, First Apostolic Administrator of Bomadi Vicariate; Fr. Kevin O'hara and Fr. Paul Hardy of St. Patrick's Missionary Society.