



SOUTHERN KADUNA FAITHFUL URGED TO REMAIN STEADFAST IN THEIR FAITH

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KAFANCHAN, NIGERIA -

The people of Southern Kaduna have been called upon to remain steadfast in their faith as handed over to them by the missionaries, in spite of the neglect and blackmail of the government and other stakeholder groups in the state.

The call was made by the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah in his homily at the funeral Mass for the late Bishop Joseph Danlami Bagobiri, the local ordinary of Kafanchan Diocese, held recently at the Kafanchan New Township Stadium, Kafanchan, Kaduna State. The homily was titled: I am for Peace, But when I Speak, they are for War (Ps. 120:7).

Bishop Kukah who dwelt extensively on how the late Bishop Bagobiri remained the voice of the suffering people of Southern Kaduna noted: "The people of Southern Kaduna have suffered the injustice of deliberate exclusion from all the rungs of local and national politics. They have got to where they are now by the sweat of their brow."

He added: "Today, Kaduna has become an open sore of injury and pain; that it is the most divided and volatile state in Nigeria is the result of the seeds of disunity sowed in the corrosive legacy of the policies of exclusion that the mafia sowed. We are sadly still not out of the woods yet."

He however continued: "We do not ask for pity or sympathy from anyone. We have come so far, not through the state but in spite of the state in northern Nigeria. That is why, as you leave this stadium, whether you are going to Abuja, Jos, or Kaduna, please look left and right and note if you will see one single federal or major State government structure on the high way. All the structures you see as you drive along are the result of the sweat from the brow of our people. The federal and state governments are absent."

Pointing out the unity among the people of Southern Kaduna, in spite of the challenges faced in the area, the homilist declared: "Our gathering here is beyond the ritual of a burial. We are gathered for a memorial, a celebration, and a festival, even a carnival. We are gathered here not as mourners with tears of sorrow in our eyes. We are gathered as men and women joyous in hope and praise. We are not gathered in tribulation, but in confident optimism."

He continued: "We do not feel a sense of loss and defeat, but no, rather a sense of exultant triumph of the risen Lord. There are no mourners and sympathizers here. All of us, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Men, Women, young and old, are gathered united as family. We are gathered here as a company of witnesses to celebrate a great man, a warrior, a statesman, and a brave and fearless man."

Bishop Kukah described the late Bishop Bagobiri, who was part of the injustice suffered by his people until his death; as a great pastor and a builder of human capital. He took over a very rural diocese with 19 Parishes drawn from Jos and Kaduna Archdioceses. Today, he has 53 Parishes and about 120 Priests. Today, he has some of the best-trained priests in Nigeria and abroad. He founded a Female Religious Congregation, a Monastery and a Tertiary institution, the St. Albert Institute. He deserves our appreciation and commendation."

He added: "In real life, he had difficulties with many people including his colleagues. He was a man of strong convictions and very often, his convictions tended to blind him to other opinions, but he was deep down an honest man. But, at heart, he was perhaps a victim of his own convictions and honesty. Thankfully, he had the chance to make peace with most of the constituencies he felt he had wronged. We sat beside one another when he suddenly

turned up at the last Bishops' Conference. We thank God that it all ended so well for him."

Bishop Kukah called on the people of Southern Kaduna, especially those late bishop had mentored "to step up to make the required sacrifice to sustain his legacy"; adding that: "He made his contribution in the development of Southern Kaduna by trying to close the gap left by the neglect of the state and federal governments."

The Bishop also used the occasion to take a swipe at the Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam Nasril El Rufai for remarking that "some religious leaders collected money from missionaries abroad to bury their dead and rebuild thousands of Churches that had been destroyed", According to the bishop: "By casting aspersion on missionary assistance, the governor betrays a troubling ignorance of the causes of the crises we have faced".

The ceremony was attended by about 18 members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), led by the President, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze of Benin City; dignitaries from all walks of life from within and outside the country and representatives of the different societies from most of the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country.

The remains of the late Bishop Danlami Joseph Bagobiri of Kafanchan Catholic Diocese was buried at St. Peter Clever Cathedral, Kafanchan, Jema'a Local Government Area of Kaduna State on Thursday, March 15, 2018. He died in Kaduna on February 27, at the age of 61 after a protracted illness.