



## **CATHOLIC YOUTHS URGED TO AVOID BEEN USED AS AGENTS OF VIOLENCE**

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### **ABUJA, NIGERIA -**

Youths of the Catholic Church have been advised not to succumb to being used as a agents of violence, no matter the level of inducement. This advise was given by the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, while declaring open the fifth National Youth Day celebration organized by the Youth office of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) in collaboration with the Catholic Archdiocese of Calabar.

The ceremony which took place at the grounds of St Patrick' College, Calabar, River State, was attended by over 7,000 youths of the various youth groups of the Church, under the umbrella of the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON). Present at the opening ceremony were: the host bishop, Most Rev. Joseph Ekuwem, Metropolitan of Calabar Ecclesiastical Province, Bishop Camillus Umoh of Ikot Ekpene Diocese; Bishop John Oyejola of Osogbo Diocese and CBCN Youth Committee Episcopal Chairman and Bishop Denis Isizoh the Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha Archdiocese.

Also in attendance were: the Executive Governor of Cross Rivers State, Professor Ben Ayade; Dr. Emmanuel E. Ekuwem, Secretary to the Government of Akwa-Ibom State, who represented Governor Emmanuel Udom; a high powered delegation of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), led by the Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Ralph Madu, Chaplains of the youth organizations from all the dioceses present, priests, religious and invited dignitaries and

leaders of the various Church groups in the state.

Archbishop Akubeze reminded the youths that their slogan; For God and for Youth, through Christ is a form of vow to God noting that going to God through Christ is a very important connection. He therefore urged them to embrace holiness of life and avoid negative influences that can keep them away from God. He stated that their connection to God should make them to work hard to please God; adding that they should be prayerful, be frequent at the Sacraments, pray the Rosary regularly, be very active in the Church and avoid allowing the desire to satisfy the flesh to ruin their lives.

In his own welcome remarks, the Director of Pastoral Agents, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi noted that the celebration helps to bring to fore two things: "To provide platform for reflection on the World Youth Day theme: 'Do not be afraid Mary; you have found favour with God (Lk 1:31) – especially for the many who will not be able to make it to Panama, early next year. Secondly, our National Celebration, while sensitizing our youths for the great celebration next year in Panama, is to essentially give us a bird's eye view of the experience of World Youth Day Celebration.

While noting that the age bracket of the youth is the time that raw energy is available, Fr, Samjumi stated that the available potentials, vitality and enthusiasm of these age bracket need "to be guided and directed to areas where energy, vitality and enthusiasm of the youths would lead to meaningful and purposeful living". He urged the delegates to the celebration not to be despondent in the present situation of the country but share their faith struggle with others; interact with other young people from provinces other than their own; get to know one another better, appreciate others more and "share more with our talents what God is doing in our lives."

The Five-day programme featured: daily celebration of the Mass, prayers, Adoration and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Stations of the Cross, Candle light procession with NYD cross/Icon of the BVM, Divine Mercy Prayer Catechesis and lectures, lighting of the NYD torch, official handover of the NYD Cross/Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary

to the 2021 host Province, and cultural parades; among others. The ceremony was rounded off with a closing Mass, with Archbishop Joseph Ekwem of Calabar as the chief celebrant.