



ARCHBISHOP EKWEM CALLS FOR SPIRITUAL REAWAKENING OF CATHOLIC YOUTHS

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CALABAR, NIGERIA -

The Metropolitan Archbishop of Calabar Province, Most Rev. Joseph Ekwem has called for a spiritual reawakening among Catholic youths so that they can become better agents of evangelization, in a world that is faced with the paucity of authentic Catholic faith. Archbishop Ekwem made the call in his welcome address to delegates from all parts of the country that attended the fifth National Youth Day celebration, held recently at the St Patrick's Catholic School, Calabar, Cross Rivers State.

The week-long programme which was organized by the Youth Animation office of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), as a prelude for the 2019 World Youth Day scheduled for Panama, was attended by over 7,000 youths and their chaplains from the different Archdioceses and dioceses in the country.

According to Archbishop Ekwem, the celebration is an opportunity for the youths to come together "and, in spiritual reawakening, seek new ways of spreading the faith and living the ideals that the faith imposes on us." He declared: "We live in times of great spiritual aridity and general poverty of faith. Let this event afford you an opportunity to reflect on the core of your lives, on the very things that matter, and on the things that make us authentically Catholic."

Urging the youths not to be afraid in the context of the theme of the celebration, the Archbishop continued: “Do not be afraid to stand for the truth. Do not be afraid to work according to the dictate of your consciences which have already been formed in the light of reason which itself has been informed by the Faith you received at Baptism.” He added: “Cherish the faith you have received, and stay rooted in Christ, the One who sustains us in spite of, and amidst, our weaknesses and human frailty.”

Archbishop Ekwem described the celebration as a gathering of brethren, brought together by God on a pilgrimage of prayer. He added: “It is an assembly of the people of God, united in faith and bonded by love. It is a reunion of brothers and sisters who have been led by the Spirit of God to come together to seek His face.”

While urging the delegates to make the best use of the opportunities offered by the spiritual celebration, Archbishop Ekwem expressed sincere gratitude to the Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful of the Ecclesiastical Province for making the celebration a reality, as well as all those who supporting the hosting in one form or the other.

In his own address, the Calabar Provincial Chaplain of Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), Rev. Fr. Maurice Mbeke described the celebration as a gathering of faith, hope and love; stressing that “it is very significant in the life of the Nigerian church as it is meant to promote and sustain the Spirit of active involvement and participation of the Youth in the Church’s Mission of Evangelization”. He added: “The National Youth Day gives the Church hierarchy the opportunity of celebrating with the Catholic youths and influencing them positively through Catechesis and formation.”

Speaking in the same vein, the National President of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYON), Mr. Toyin Gabriel Ogunlade remarked: “As we have gathered here in Calabar to journey with Mary, we pray that through our different spiritual and educative reflections/lectures, mission and social encounters, we shall receive new grace, increased strength, and awakened spirit with a firm resolve to stand up for our faith particularly in these challenging times.”

He called on the youths of the Church to pursue an agenda that will bring hope, social and moral change and comfort for individual and collective essence as Catholic youths; in spite of the socio-economic, religious, ethnic and political challenges facing the country. While calling on the Government to explore wider avenues to ensure social security for the youths of the country, Mr Ogunlade admonished the youths to discharge their civic responsibilities religiously and participate actively in the country's electoral process in the 2019 General Elections.