



Features: THE GRAVEYARD CITY

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

On November 2, 2015, I followed some priests of the Oblates of Saint Joseph to say Mass for the dead in a Cemetery in Rome. As we were getting close to the Cemetery, I started seeing tall buildings with each floor decorated with flowers. I thought it was an estate or a city in Rome. When we arrived, behold the buildings were graves. That was the first time I saw corpses buried inside the wall. Then I knew that burring the dead was a business for some companies in Europe. The City of Rome's Cemetery Department maintains a total of 99 acres in four historic cemeteries: Myrtle Hill Cemetery, Oak Hill Cemetery, East view Cemetery, and Oakland Cemetery, along with the newer Myrtle Hill Mausoleum (<https://www.romefloyd.com/departments/cemetery>). The cemetery I visited has a crematorium. Individuals and families choose either casket burial or cremation as the means of body disposition after death like some countries that have funeral homes. Cemeteries are maintained in civilized societies in a way and manner that death no longer appear like punishment but a natural medium to a transcendent home.

There was a little Chapel in the building where the Oblates of Saint Joseph bury their departed brothers. There we offered mass for the souls of the departed Oblates and the Souls of the departed in the Cemetery. Aftermass, we toured round the different buildings. On some of the graves were epitaphs of Departed heroes, Artists, Theologians, Philosophers, Scientists and great people who in human judgement had fulfilled life on earth and died in peace. These were people who promoted human dignity and cannot be forgotten in beautiful sepulchers. Their good deeds are

buried in the memory of humanity. God had delivered them from sudden death. The graveyard is a home in the city of the dead. In this city, there are no kings and servants. The equality of humanity is made manifest in the graveyard city. There are also inhabitants of this city that never lived fully. The Spirit of those whose life were terminated prematurely keep crying for vengeance. In the graveyard, there exist unfilled dreams and never actualized potentials. Their dreams, desires and potentials were destroyed by incompetent, greedy and corrupt rulers who never merited power to lead the people. To them applies this wise saying: "Do not give a person leadership because you like him, but give a person leadership because he is competent". Power given out of bias, partiality and injustice is a weapon for human destruction.

The vision and mission of life are captured in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "God made us to know him, love him, serve him so as to be happy with him on the last day." The vision of life is to attain heaven where eternal life is spent. The mission of life is to love God and be happy. The love of God that brings happiness is the love of neighbour (Matthew 25:40-45). Jesus assures us that there are many mansions in his Father's house. He has gone to prepare a place for us so that where he is, we too may be (John 14). Even with the promise of heaven as the final vision of humanity, God created human beings for happiness hence, Jesus Christ came into the world so that human beings may have life and have it in abundance (John 10:10). To this end, many People spent time on earth, praying, fasting and doing all the good works to please God and humanity as their mission to reach the vision of heaven. Unfortunately, man has become wolf to man (*Homo homini lupus*) according to the memoir of Janusz Bardach and Kathleen Gleeson in the context of the second world war (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_Is_Wolf_to_Man).

Who would have ever thought that what we used to perceive as film trick would be a reality in Nigeria? I am yet to recover from an unusual graveyard city that was created within a day at Ayati pilgrim site in Benue state during the mass burial of Rev. Fathers Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha along with seventeen worshipers who were killed at St. Ignatius Quasi Parish Ukpok-Mbalom in Ayar-Mbalom community of Gwer East LGA on Tuesday, April 24, 2018. This graveyard complex was not part of the original master plan of Ayati pilgrim site. In Nigeria today, the chronology of graveyards that have been created for mass burial are numerous. Now is the time to stop the senseless killings that

is turning Nigeria into a glorified graveyard. These killings are given varied interpretations that could increase mutual suspicions among people of different religious and ethnic groupings of those who have coexisted peacefully for centuries. For God's sake, the security agents should please wake up to their responsibilities and do the needful.

One could be right to say that the fall out of the graveyards cited in Nigeria is the creation of another graveyard that is inhabited by people who are still living. I am referring to the various Internally Displaced People Camps in Nigeria. Some people in the IDP camps wished that they were dead because they have lost their loved ones whose graves they may never behold to decorate with flowers. They are displaced and robbed of their human dignity. Though they were never lazy beggars, they have become subjects of misery and pity. They have been morally killed and displaced by those who do not believe that if you save the life of one person, you have saved the whole of humanity and if you kill one person unjustly, it is as if you have killed the whole of humanity (Qur'an 5:32). There is silence in the graveyards of the physically dead whereas those in the IDP Camps cry in agony with a loud silence of unbearable trauma.

For those who have faith in the resurrection and the gains of heaven after the pains in this world, they still believe that the only true leader who can save humanity is God who is king, with majesty enrobed (Psalm 92: 1-2,5). Given that death is a necessary end and that this world is not a permanent home not even for the killers of innocent human beings, Jesus has these words of comfort for us. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:28-31).

Paul says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, do not give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). The present realities are serious challenges to this message of nonviolence. We live among some people who have "sold their heads to buy a cap." We need mental re-engineering and reconstruction of attitudes to confront the leaders and elders in Nigeria who have turned themselves into

“untouchable” while trading on human blood and preying on the citizens for their daily bread (Psalm 53:4). It is painful that they appear to be succeeding in using religion and ethnicity as their veritable tools, armor and shield. True Muslims and true Christians who value life and believe in the destiny of humanity must therefore come together in the form of dialogue of social engagement to demand accountability from the government at all levels. If we succeed in doing this, never again will the nation suffer a genocide that could terminate the dreams of any citizen or wipe out a whole community. May God deliver us from sudden death that is caused by all types of terrorism! Together, let us grow a better Nigeria fit enough for human habitation instead of a nation that is becoming a graveyard.

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