



THE WORD OF GOD, OUR SHIELD AND HOPE AGAINST THE PALPABLE DARKNESS HOVERING OVER NIGERIA - Archbishop Akubeze

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The darkness hovering the Nigerian nation is a palpable one but the people have been urged not to despair and hope in the Word of God as the light of Christ always dispel darkness, sadness and hopelessness. This admonition was given by the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), and the Archbishop of Benin City Ecclesiastical Province; Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze while declaring open the first Plenary meeting of the Bishops Conference in Abuja, early this month.

The one-week programme which had *The Word of God: A Lamp to my feet and a Light to my Path (Psalm 119:105)*; as its theme; was held at the CSN Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja, and was attended by over 60 members of the Conference. It started with a concelebrated opening Mass at the St. Gabriel Chaplaincy Church, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); featured deliberations on several aspects of the state of the Church and the nation, a prayer protest solidarity march for those who have died as a result of the state of insecurity in the country; interactive session with the leaders of the various groups of the Church; and ended with a closing Mass, at which a communique on the decisions of the Bishops was read.

Speaking on the relevance of the theme of the conference in respect of the present state of the Nigerian nation, Archbishop Akubeze noted: "Our nation, Nigeria also needs the light in this moment of darkness. A darkness that is

so palpable that even the blind can feel it. We live at a very difficult time in the life of this nation that we all love.” He added: “The light of Christ always dispels darkness, sadness and hopelessness.”

Urging the people not to despair but hope in the Word of God; Archbishop Akubeze stated that the devil is on rampage in Nigeria and declared: “In the face of the political, social, religious and cultural unrest that have made life in our country brutish, nasty and short, we cannot give in to despair and throw our hands in the air in utter hopelessness. We have a role to play to remedying the situation. We have to collectively raise our voices in condemnation of the recklessness in government, the crass abuse of power, the loss of regard for the sanctity of human life, the wanton killing of the innocent, the insecurity of lives and property, to mention but a few. We must voice our displeasure of the state of affairs so loud that we cannot be ignored.”

Archbishop Akubeze also spoke on the persecution of Christians in the North East region of the country and the celebration of the Year of the Word of God as directed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis. On the atrocities of the Boko Haram insurgents in the northwest against Christians, the CBCN President commended the steadfastness of Christians in the region in spite of the killings and other atrocities committed by the insurgents. His words: “We are always praying for you. We cannot even imagine what you are going through. Reading daily of your persecutions because of your faith reminds us that the blood of the martyrs waters the seed of the faith. The Church grows faster whenever she is persecuted.”

On the celebration of the year of the Word of God, the CBCN President called for the stoppage of all abuses creeping into the Liturgy of the Church. He noted among other things that: “whenever the word of God is being read, the faithful should listen with rapt attention; in the reading and interpretation of Scripture, we must maintain a hermeneutic of continuity; and avoidance of selective citation of Scripture that is completely disconnected with the overall Christian message of salvation and love.”

In his goodwill message, the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi reiterated the

importance of sincere collaboration between the office of the Apostolic Nunciature in the country and the Bishops' Conference, in the service of the Church in Nigeria. He added that the cordiality that has existed in this respect has facilitated his mission in the country. He spoke extensively on the roles of the Bishops as the successors of the apostles and ambassadors of the Holy Father; and the importance of reconciliation and love in the life of the Church. He stressed: "Dear brothers, to us is entrusted 'the message of reconciliation (2Cor.5,19), a message of truth, justice and love. We hear everyday many messages of division and hatred. All the more reason for us not to say except 'the message of reconciliation.'"