



PRIESTS URGED TO REMAIN STEADFAST IN THEIR VOCATION IN SPITE OF CHALLENGES

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BENIN CITY -

Priests of the Catholic Church have been admonished to remain steadfast in their vocation, amidst the various challenges of life; and “never allow past failures to discourage them from striving for holiness”. The call was made by the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, in his homily at the celebration of this year’s Chrism Mass in the Archdiocese, on Thursday, June 24, at the Holy Cross Cathedral, Benin City, Edo State. Speaking on the vital role of the sacred priesthood in the life of the Church and salvation of man, Archbishop Akubeze noted that through the Holy Orders, priests are configured to function in the person of Christ.

While appreciating some of the priests for their perseverance and sacrifices in carrying out their spiritual and pastoral activities under hard conditions, Archbishop Akubeze

urged the lay faithful to continue to support them to function better, noting that “a psychologically healthy priest is more efficient in the pastoral field.” He added that the Bishop also has the obligation to listen to his priests, protect their rights, and foster their spiritual and pastoral life through continuous formations. Using the readings of the day to accentuate the responsibilities of priests with regards to carrying out the ministry of teaching, sanctifying, governing and proclamation of the word of God through their homilies, the Archbishop also spoke on the abuse of responsibilities, and urged priests to be cautious of this challenge.

He noted among other things: “We priests are called to make bold declaration on the word of God. We must exercise our prophetic ministry by speaking the truth on moral and social issues. We must exercise our prophetic ministry through the proper conscience formation of people. But priestly, prophetic ministry does not extend to giving forecast of who will be elected into a political office. It does not extend to predicting who will win a Supreme Court political petition. The CBCN President continued: “No, our prophetic role should not be exercised by giving political advice to politicians. We are to be their spiritual advisers and not political advisers. We must remain completely apolitical. We must praise government performing well and condemn those failing the people. This is a moral obligation. But such condemnation should not come from the pulpit or during homilies.” Directors of Social Communications and the Vicars

for Politics were prompted to play advisory roles as guides, to ensure that priests do not wane in this perspective.

Archbishop Akubeze calling on priests to live a better life as priests through faithful priestly service. He reminded them of the relevance of the “Word of God as a Lamp for our steps”. His words: “The life of the Church and the activities of the Church are built around the teachings in Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition. The Word of God should guide our actions. This can only happen when we reflect deeply upon the word of God. We can only reflect upon the word of God if we develop the culture of silent meditation. Only a priest who has learned to listen to God speaking to him before the Blessed Sacrament can have meaningful insights to bring to the people of God.”

The Archbishop also spoke on the relevance of the three oils blessed at the Chrism Mass saying: “The three oils that we are going to bless today points to the vitality of the Church. It shows us that Christ is with us. From the oil of the sick, that brings healing and forgiveness to the recipient, to the oil of catechumen that is used for those embracing the Catholic faith, to the oil of chrism used at baptism, confirmation, dedication of altar, priestly and Episcopal consecration. The efficacy of these sacramental has been proven several times in the past.”