



DON'T LOSE HOPE

Aug 19, 2020

ADAMAWA STATE -

Hope in Catholic Theology is described as one of the three theological virtues. St Thomas Aquinas defines it as “a future good, difficult but possible to attain...by means of the Divine Assistance...on whose help it leans”. Hope is often oriented towards some future good. Like the other two theological virtues of faith and charity, hope finds its “origin, motive, and object” in God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1812). The author of the letter to the Hebrews gives this injunction: “Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy” (Hebrews 10:23). Hope as a theological virtue, is an infused virtue. Unlike any good habit that is the outcome of a repeated action or the product of our own industry, hope is a divine gift, bestowed by God Himself.

In Christian tradition, *hope in Christ* and faith in Christ are closely linked. Hope connotes a firm assurance that is anchored on faith. It does mean that even in the face of trials,

tragedies and difficulties, hope is able to sustain the faith and endurance of the Christian faithful. It is the “anchor of the soul”. For instance, it was hope that sustained the early Christians during their persecutions by some Roman emperors. Their Christian hope enabled them to withstand the sufferings and pains inflicted upon them by the likes of Nero, Diocletian, Domitian, Gaius (Caligula), Tiberius, Commodus and Marcus Aurelius. As those early Christians were concerned, hope in Christ sustained their resolve since it was like an investment of faith for a better tomorrow that was worth all the pain.

In my previous reflection, I briefly relayed what the Colosseum meant in popular Christian Folklore. The Colosseum is generally regarded by Christians as a site of the martyrdom of many believers during the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. Beside the cruelty associated with it, the Colosseum also stands as a grim emblem of hope. The sands of history are stained by the blood of innocent martyrs whose stories of faith and struggle continues to encourage those who persecuted especially Christians. For instance, in Kebbi State, natives and traditional worshipers are ruthlessly killed and displaced from their lands. Their persecution has been going on for the past six months. Sadly, no mention of their suffering has made it in the media outlet in Nigeria including the social media. Zamfara State where majority of the communities that are attacked are Muslims, have gained little or no coverage after a failed settlement with bandits they have been bleeding unattended for months now.

On the 2nd of July 2020, the EYN Church in Adamawa State hosted a world conference and shared with the world, the number of lives and properties they had lost in the mayhem of Boko Haram from November 2019 till date. The church detailed the names of the victims as well as their communities that have been rendered inhabitable as a result of the sanguineous campaign by Boko Haram. According to Rev Joel S. Billi the national President of EYN Church, “we lost 8,370 to Boko Haram” with 700,000 members displaced, (Daily Trust July 3th 2020). In his press conference, about twenty-two separate attacks were mentioned by the National President, Rev Joel S Billi.

I will just recount three: First, “the 16th June, 2020 was a thick cloud of man’s inhumanity to man as Boko Haram devastated Mbulabam of Chibok LGA of Borno State abducting a young girl by name Mary IshakuNkeke while her two brothers Emmanuel and Iliya went missing for three days. Second,the following day 17th June, 2020 the same Boko Haram came to Kautikari community Chibok LGA of Borno State killing three:Mr Musa Dawa 25 years old married, Mr Yusuf Joel 30 years single and Mr Jacob Dawa 35 years married. Five women and girls were abducted all members of EYN. They are Martha Yaga 22 years single, Mary Filibus 13 years old single, SaratuSaidu 22 years single, Eli Augustine

21 years married and SaratuYaga 20 years married. Five days after, being 22nd June, 2020, Boko Haram yet again invaded Kautikari community of Chibok LGA of Borno State killing BiraBazam 48 years old married and Ba MainaMadu 62 years old. Three girls were abducted, LarabaBulama 20 years old single, HauwaBulama 18 years single and MaryamuYohanna 15 years single. Third, the month of June ended on a sad note for EYN as Boko Haram attacked farmers of Nasarawo, Kautikari of Chibok LGA of Borno State killing MrZaramaiKubirvu 40 years old married” (Rev Bill; 2nd July Press Conference).

Elsewhere outside Nigeria, terrorists are leaving no stone untouched in their determination to allow any respite to Christians. The members of ISIS made no secret about their plans to exterminate Christians when they began their killing spree in 2012. In March 2014 in a Convent in Aiden, Yemen where some Catholic Nuns work as caregivers to the elderly, ISIS slaughtered the following nuns: Sisters Anselm from India, Marguerite from Rwanda, Judith from Kenya and Reginette from Rwanda). The mayhem of these terrorists is now a global nightmare. Back home in Nigeria, Christians as well as Muslims sleep with one eye and use the second to be on the look for the ravaging men of Boko Haram and Bandits who give their hapless victims two options: conversion to their brand of Islam or death. What else does the Christian have as an anchor in the face of such daunting persecution? The answer is HOPE that does not abandon the Christian

faithful. It is that hope that inspires our dream about Nigeria where Christians and Muslims be free and happy to practice their faith as enshrined in the federal constitution.

Finally; when the system is saturated with hopelessness and news of various impasses: socially, economically and politically, it is heartwarming and encouraging to hear the flip side of the story; numbers, figures and names might just be a single narrative to the entire saga, and we must be careful. Speaking at length with the Secretary of the Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri, Fr John Bakeni on the 7th of July 2020, I felt happy and encouraged to hear the great dialogue and friendship that has resulted in the rebuilding of Churches by the former government of Kashim Shettima and the current government of Babagana Umaru Zulum. These are signs of hope for the future, and we commend them. The faith community has suffered great losses in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe more directly as a result of the activities of Boko Haram; some of the Christian faith leaders have confirmed to me that they are yet to feel the impact of the Presidential Committee on the Rebuilding of the North East. This too can give us hope.