



LATE Fr. BELLO: WE ARE FRIGHTENED AND WORRIED, ARCHBISHOP NDAGOSO CRIED OUT

Jun 02, 2021

KADUNA, NIGERIA -

The incessant kidnap and killing of Catholic Priests has worried the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna, Most Rev. Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso has cried out saying that they (priests) are rightly afraid and worried because they are human and that it is nothing to be ashamed of to raise an alarm.

Archbishop Ndagoso raised the alarm in his homily at the funeral Mass of late Rev. Fr. Alphonsus Yashim Bello on Tuesday, June 1, 2021 at Our Lady's Church, Independence Way, Kaduna.

Fr. Bello was murdered following the May 20 attack on St. Vincent Ferrer Malunfashi Parish Katsina State, North-West, Nigeria under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto.

In his words, Archbishop Ndagoso said: “Dear brother priests, with all these serious challenges and threats to our lives, are we afraid? Why not? Are we frightened? Why not? Are we worried? Why not? We are rightly afraid, frightened and worried because we are human and it is nothing to be ashamed of”.

He however, assured his clergy that the God who called them and entrusted His work to them is with them because He is Emmanuel, and this is his assurance to each of us: “Do not fear for I am with you.

Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. All who are incensed against you will be ashamed and disgraced; those who strive against you will be as nothing and will perish. For I, the Lord your God, uphold your right hand, it is I who say to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel” (Is. 41: 10-14).

Below is Archbishop Ndagoso’s homily:

A HOMILY DELIVERED BY MOST REV. MATTHEW MAN-OSO NDAGOSO AT THE FUNERAL MASS OF LATE REV. FR. ALPHONSUS YASHIM BELLO ON JUNE 1, 2021 AT OUR LADY’S CHURCH, INDEPENDENCE WAY, KADUNA

“Wake Lord! Why are you asleep? Awake! Do not abandon us for good. Why do you turn your face away, forgetting that we are poor and harassed (Ps. 44:23).

Once again I welcome all of you that have come from far and near to share in our grief and to pray with us for late Fr. Alphonsus Yashim Bello who was gruesomely murdered on Friday, May 21, 2021.

We have appreciated and will continue to appreciate your kind support and solidarity in our hour of need. We are indeed very grateful. May the good Lord reward you abundantly for your kind support and solidarity.

I welcome in a special way the Bishop of Sokoto Most. Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah under whom Fr. Alphonsus worked and died and all the priests, the religious and the faithful of Sokoto Diocese who accompanied him to this funeral.

And in a very special way I welcome family members of late Fr. Alphonsus especially his mother and siblings. I know that the last one year has been a very difficult one for the family. May the God of all consolations be your strength in these very difficult and trying moments.

We are gathered yet again to bury another young, energetic, dynamic, hardworking,

dedicated and committed priest whose life was brutally and tragically cut short. We take consolation in the fact that the short priestly life of Fr. Alphonsus was an intense one. He lived a very active life and died in active service. He was a fide donum priest in the Diocese of Sokoto. He died on mission. For him it is mission accomplished.

Looking at the mortal remains of Fr. Alphonsus in front of all of us especially members of his immediate family and most especially his mother readily brings to mind the moving and pathetic story of Job and his three friends who visited him when he was afflicted by series of disasters as we heard a short while ago in the first reading.

Overwhelmed by what they saw the friends wept aloud, tore their robes, threw dust over their heads and sat there beside Job for seven days and seven nights without uttering a word because they saw how much he was suffering (cf. Job 2: 11-13).

Experience has shown that at times like this, words do not simply add up, if anything, they become grossly inadequate to express our deepest feelings. I am sure this is the situation with many of us here in this church especially the family members of our late brother.

Like the friends of Job, all we can do now is to sit beside each other especially beside the beloved of Fr. Alphonsus in deep silence and share in their grief.

Dear friends, it goes without saying that we are gathered here because of what happened on that black Friday night, May 21, 2021, when Fr. Alphonsus was brutally and gruesomely murdered. We are here therefore to commend his soul into the hands of our Merciful Father and to ask him to grant him the reward of eternal life.

Though shocked, saddened and shaken by the gruesome and tragic murder of Fr. Alphonsus we are not without hope or help. Consequently, we are here also to do what the Bible enjoins us to do in situations like this, namely, to bless and not curse those who persecute us and to weep with those who weep (cf. Rom. 12:14-16).

In other words, we are here to pray for the repentance and conversion of the perpetrators of these heinous crimes. We therefore pray that God will give the victims of these criminal activities and their loved ones the grace to forgive so that they do not become victims twice.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus died darkness covered the earth. His disciples and friends experienced darkness. They felt lost and disoriented. Their hopes and dreams crumbled.

They had no idea that that darkness did not have the last say. Christ the word made flesh shined again through his glorious resurrection. We in the in the Archdiocese of

Kaduna and the Diocese of Sokoto felt the way the disciples of Jesus felt on that faithful May 21, 2021.

Yes, on that darkest of nights, Friday night of May 21, a truly dark cloud hung over the Catholic communities of the Archdiocese of Kaduna and the Diocese of Sokoto.

Talking about the dark clouds reminds me of the visit of Pope Benedict VI to Auschwitz in May 2005. As we may well be aware, Auschwitz is a concentration camp in Poland during the Second World War where millions of Jews were gassed to death by the German Nazis.

In a speech at the camp the Pope said: "To speak in this place of horror, in this place where unprecedented mass crimes were committed against God and man is almost impossible...In a place like this, words fail, in the end, there can only be a dread silence – a silence which is itself a heartfelt cry to God: Why, Lord, did you remain silent? How could you tolerate all this? How many questions arise in this place! Constantly the question comes up: Where was God in those days? Why was he silent? How could he permit this endless slaughter, this triumph of evil?"

Then quoting the words of Psalm 44, the Psalm of this liturgy and a psalm of Israel's lament for its woes, sufferings and sorrows the Pope said: "You have broken us in the haunt of jackals, and covered us with deep darkness...because of you we are being killed

all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For we sink down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up, come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love” (Psalm 44:19, 22-26).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this cry of anguish which Israel raised to God in its suffering, at moments of deep stress, is also the cry for help raised by all those who in every age suffer for the love of God, the love of truth and the love of goodness. And this is the anguish not only of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Kaduna and the Diocese of Sokoto but of most Nigerians today.

Like the Israelites of old, in difficult and trying moments, it is easy, very easy, to think that the God of compassion and love, the God of the persecuted and minorities is absent, deaf and dumb.

As Christians and with the benefit of hindsight we know that the Israelites were never abandoned by God. He was always with them and always found a way for them to triumph over their enemies. We know that even when Jesus cried out on the cross, “Eloi Eloi, lama sabachtani” (“My God, my God, why have you abandon me” Mk. 15:34), he was not abandoned by his Father. He was right there with him on the cross hence his

triumphant and glorious resurrection.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is not only legitimate but natural to be angry, complain and even query God's seeming absence and silence in difficult and trying times such as the one our country and our state in particular are passing through.

In point of fact such honest anger and complain to or against God are signs of trust and a healthy relationship with him and the legendary man of patience, Job, did that.

In his time of intense suffering he not only complained but queried God. He said: "I cannot keep quiet: in my anguish of spirit I will speak, in my bitterness of soul I will complain...Why do you choose me as your target? Why should I be a burden to you? Can you not tolerate my sin, not overlook my fault" (Job 7: 11 and 20).

We who believe know that that God is in all our situations because he is Emmanuel. He is with us, not sometimes but all the time. Consequently, and by the grace of God we shall like the Jews of old be conquerors. God will surely see our country through these difficult and challenging times.

What we often construe as God's deafness to our cry and absence in our difficult situations is in fact his powerful presence in silence. And as we know, silence is a

powerful language of God.

God was neither absent nor silent on that black Friday night of May 21, 2021 when Fr. Alphonsus was brutally murdered. He was right there with him as he was always with the Israelites in their various captivities and his Son hanging on the Cross.

In the same vein we believe that God is with Fr. John Shokwello Bako, wherever he is, Fr. Francis Aweso Bako and his parishioners, Fr. Joseph Keke, Leah Sharibu, the remaining Chibok girls and indeed all in captivity because he is Emmanuel.

Our challenge as Christians is that whatever situation we find ourselves in we must continue to be children of our Father who is in heaven and the way to do this is to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (cf. Matt. 5:43) because love conquers all. This is the demand of our religion, no more, no less.

The faithful of the Archdiocese of Kaduna, the Diocese of Sokoto Diocese and the family of late Fr. Alphonsus are the real victims of this dastardly act. And painful as it is if we are not to remain victims forever, we have to take the right step moving forward, namely, forgive those who have done this to us even if we do not know them.

Doing this will make us true disciples of our Master who did not only pray for the

forgiveness of his executioners but also made excuses for them. He prayed: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:32). And this is truly the predicament of the murderer of Fr. Alphonsus and many others like them. They do not know what they do.

Nonetheless, we all know that we cannot talk about genuine forgiveness, reconciliation and peace without first of all working for justice and fair play for all. A situation where equal citizens are treated unequally because of ethnic, religious, political and social affiliation does not auger well for peace and peaceful co-existence.

If lasting peace is to be achieved in our country the causes of dissension such as excessive economic inequalities, disregard for people’s right, systemic and deliberate policies of exclusion, nepotism etc.

This calls for a change of heart and deliberate efforts at the promotion of the common good. Peace as the fathers of the Second Vatican Council tell us is the fruit of the harmony built into human society by the Creator and is brought about by men and women as they strive to attain an even more perfect justice (cf. *The Church in the Modern World*, 78).

No one here needs telling that our country is currently at war; at war with religious

fanatics, bandits, kidnappers, terrorists, AK47 wielding herders and opportunists who are criminals in every sense of the word, killing and maiming innocent Nigerians regardless of religion, ethnicity and political leanings. Therefore, those charged with the constitutional duty of protecting and securing our lives and property should wake up from their slumbers and go after them.

In spite of all we remain grateful to our security agencies and thank them for making the best of the situation to protect us. They often put their lives on the line to secure us and many of them have lost their lives in the line of duty. We are grateful to them. It must be admitted that without them the situation would have been worst.

This said, I believe that like everything else in life there is always room for improvement. Our security agents need to work harder especially in the area of intelligence gathering, sharing and surveillance.

It is truly incredible that with available technology what is happening in our country is happening. There is much left to be desired in this regard. Government should of necessity invest more in this area by adequately equipping them and take good care of their essential needs to motivate them.

Without adequate security that enables the citizens to freely conduct their legitimate

businesses, the roads, railways, hospitals, schools etc that we build will become useless. These infrastructures can only be useful when there is peace and security enabling free and secure movements. Consequently, protection of human life and security of property are of paramount importance to the country today more than anything else.

Given where we are, it goes without saying that our pastoral agents especially the priests live in challenging and even frightening times like other highlighted or visible Nigerians.

In the words of St. Paul, we pastoral agents are subjected to all kinds of hardship but never distressed. We see no way out but never despair. We are pursued but never cut off. We are knocked down but still have some life in us. We carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus too may be visible in our body (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-10).

Last Saturday one of our young priests, Fr. Kieran Gonap while addressing the congregation in Kukyer about the kidnap of Fr. Francis Aweso Bako and the murder of Fr. Alphonsus said: "With or without kidnapping the work of proclaiming the Gospel must go on. We cannot stop. We cannot run away."

I felt happy and encouraged by that. Fr. Gonap was actually re-echoing what St. Paul said to the suffering minority Christians of Rome when he asked rhetorically: "Can

anything cut us off from the love of Christ - can hardships or distress, or persecution, or lack of food and clothing, or threats or violence; as scripture says: for your sake we are being massacred all day long, treated as sheep to be slaughtered? No, we come through all these things triumphantly victorious, by the power of him who loved us.

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rm. 8: 35-39).

Dear brother priests, with all these serious challenges and threats to our lives, are we afraid? Why not? Are we frightened? Why not? Are we worried? Why not? We are rightly afraid, frightened and worried because we are human and it is nothing to be ashamed of. However, be sure of this, the God who called us and entrusted his work to us is with us because he is Emmanuel.

And this is his assurance to each of us: "Do not fear for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. All who are incensed against you will be ashamed and disgraced; those who strive against you will be as nothing and will perish. For I, the Lord your God, uphold your right hand, it is I who say to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you. Your Redeemer is the Holy One

of Israel” (Is. 41: 10-14).

Finally, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is my hope and prayer that these words of St. Paul to Timothy accompany Fr. Alphonsus Yashim Bello as we lay him to rest: “As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to depart.

I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come for me now is the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give to me on that Day, and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim. 4: 6-8).

May the Soul of Fr. Alphonsus Yashim Bello and the souls of all the faithful departed through the Mercy of God rest in perfect peace. Amen.