

HOMILY BY HIS GRACE, MOST REV ANTHONY J.V. OBINNA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY OF NIGERIA
AT THE MARIA ASSUMPTA CATHEDRAL, OWERRI
SUNDAY, 27TH SEPTEMBER, 2020
(26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A.)

If a man turns from the wickedness he has committed and does what is right and just,... he shall surely live, he shall not die. (cf. 1st reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28)

The sins of my youth... remember not. (cf. Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25)

Complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. (cf. 2nd reading: Philippians 2:1-11)

Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. (cf. Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Although we no longer sing Nigeria's first national anthem, its wordings reflect how we started as a nation:

Nigeria we hail thee
Our own dear native land
Though tribe and tongue may differ
In brotherhood we stand
Nigerians all and proud to
Serve our sovereign motherland

O God of all creation
Grant this our one request
Help us to build a nation
Where no man is oppressed
And so with peace and plenty
Nigeria may be blessed

Indeed our ethnic plurality or diversity was clearly recognized, yet out of a common sense of patriotism, we pledged to live in friendly brotherhood and to serve our nation Nigeria with pride. We even invoked God to help us build a just and equitable nation that will flourish with peace and sufficiency for all. What a

virtuous, prosperous and laudable vision Nigerians held out for themselves at the beginning of our national journey on October 1, 1960.

That very day fired into me at the age of fourteen, a personal patriotic ambition to use my talents to make Nigeria proud. For on that October 1, the results of the 1959 first school leaving certificate examination were released and I was among those who passed with distinction.

Unfortunately, initially virtuous and patriotic Nigeria turned away from its pledge of brotherhood, justice, equity and peace and embraced the path of selfish political ambitions for power and money that hired thugs and violence and thus paved the way for military coups, genocide and the Nigeria-Biafra war.

Even after the broad trumpeting of no victor, no vanquished after the civil war with the proposal of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, ambitious military and political leaders colluded to instigate new coup d'états and new crises in order to enrich themselves and oppress the citizens thereby bringing about the prostrate and groaning situation in which our peoples, our lands, our economy, our institutions, our structures and infrastructures lie.

While some segments of Nigeria are rejoicing from exploiting the brutal and fractured state of Nigeria, many others are lamenting and pushing for the end of Nigeria through self-determination moves and pressures.

In Nigeria's bleeding, groaning, criminal, hateful and fractured situation, God's display of his all-powerfulness in pardoning, forgiving and showing mercy invites us Nigerians to a new commitment of brotherhood, justice, equity, peace and prosperity if Nigeria is to continue as a genuine and not a pitiable nation. Indeed if wicked Nigerians and wicked Nigeria turn from our corporate and personal wickedness and begin to do what is right and just, Nigeria can preserve its life and not die. The leaders of our nation must in the process become as humble as tax collectors and prostitutes who in their penitence give up all pride in sin, crimes and iniquity.

Our Lord Jesus Christ who is greater than any pope, archbishop, president, governor or field marshal gives us the example of humble, servant leadership to the point of emptying himself onto the humiliating death on a cross. If Nigeria's leaders will give such exemplary service and minimize nepotism, embezzlement of public funds and use of intimidation by official and unofficial security personnel, we will begin to be of the same mind, share the same love and be more truly united in heart and purpose.

Arise then O compatriots; let us embrace the way of compassion, love and mercy for a better and greater Nigeria.