"TWO HANDS, TWO WINGS"

Homily of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke on the 30th Sunday Year A, at Holy Name Parish, Birmingham, MI on October 24-25, 2026

1. Preamble

A couple of days ago, I remarked to Archbishop Edward Weisenburger that I have been to a parish on the Lake (St. Paul on the Lake), another on the Hills (St. Hugo on the Hills) and probably, the next one, yours, will be on the Valley. I was just kidding! Here I am in your parish in this special season when the trees are aflame with colours.

I am glad to be here. It is always a privilege to celebrate the Eucharist; a sacrament in which the living Christ encounters us, nourishes us with His Word and with His Body. We can never thank God enough for this opportunity granted to all of us. I thank also Msgr. Zenz, for the kind words he wrote about me on your webpage. I appreciate the parochial vicar, Fr. Karl and all of you gathered here, as the family of God, to worship our loving Father.

2. Conspiracies Against Jesus

In the Gospel last Sunday, the Pharisees and the Herodians asked Jesus whether it was right to pay the census tax. They were not asking for clarification. It was a trap. Jesus knew better and gave them an answer that disarmed them. He told them, "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." In the Gospel today, the Pharisees set another trap. They asked Jesus: "which is the greatest commandment?" If Jesus highlighted one commandment as the greatest, he risked offending, on the one hand, those who held another of the commandments as more important than the one highlighted, and on the other, those convinced that all the commandments were of equal importance. What a trap! Jesus sidestepped the trap by drawing attention, not to a commandment, but to the principle that gives meaning to all the commandments. As Jesus said, on these two, love of God and love of neighbour, "hang the whole law and the prophets."

3. Two Hands, Two Wings

Jesus used the Pharisees' trap to teach humanity an abiding lesson. Every commandment hangs on love of God and love of neighbour. Both, not one of them, constitute the principle that gives meaning to every effort to please God.

I want to make two remarks about Jesus' answer. First, it is about love – love of God and love of neighbour. Love entails a special kind of relationship. In love, one values, cherishes, cares about and for the other. One goes the extra mile for the good of the other. This is what God showed us in Jesus Christ. Unless and until we experience God's love for us personally, we cannot reciprocate or respond to this love, much less share the love with our neighbours.

The second element in Jesus' answer is that love of God and love of neighbour should never be separated. Separating them has always been a human temptation. There are Christians who claim to love God but hate some human beings. There are some who claim to love their neighbour, fight for justice and equity for all. These are good. But without an anchor in the love of God, one risks a burn-out in one's commitment for the good of others. It is important, therefore, to remember that on one wing a bird cannot fly. Only on two wings is a bird's flight possible. This reminds me of a saying back home in Nigeria that it takes both hands to tie a knot. Love of God must always be matched with love of neighbour. But who is my neighbour one may ask?

4. But who is my Neighbour?

Jesus was asked this question. And he told the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). We are all invited to be like the good Samaritan – to assist the vulnerable and weak – whoever they might be. The message I want to share with you is about the weak and the vulnerable and an invitation to be the good Samaritan towards them. First let me tell you how it started. There was this woman I met when I was a newly ordained priest. She was very active in the parish. She was leading the women and did a lot for the children. She did all these as a volunteer. After my stay in the parish, I left and she also relocated. We lost contact. Recently, someone called me on phone and extended the lady's greetings. I was happy to hear from her and promised to visit her. When I did, I received the shock of my life. It was raining when I arrived. I stepped into her house and saw water dripping on many spots. The roof leaked badly. According to her, when it rained, she would coil herself in her mat in a small corner to avoid getting soaked. She then narrated her tale of woes. She had lost her husband. Much later, her only daughter, who was the breadwinner for the family, died and left

two granddaughters. These are unemployed and have no assured source of income. Friends and neighbours tried their best to help. With time, such help dwindled. People had their own problems. Her situation progressively got worse – she was in her 90s, sick, frail, malnourished and unsure of the next meal. I still remember her lament: "why has God left me to go through this?"

This is one of my many experiences. My priests have their stories too. These experiences became the origin of our commitment as a diocese to take care of vulnerable adults and children, to honour the image of God in them and show them love. Back home, one's children are one's social security and insurance. Therefore, the death of a breadwinner plunges the dependents, especially parents and grandparents, into poverty. Ours is a rural area. The young migrate to the cities, leaving the elderly behind. Even those whose children could provide for, do not find it easy because of a lack of trained care-givers.

In response to this, we set up, as a Diocese, a pilot project: a home where vulnerable adults and children are cared for as one large family. The idea is to provide the senior citizens the energy of the young and the young with the stability of the elderly and to encourage inter-generational bonding. The facility has 30 rooms. As we speak, there are 42 residents sharing the 30 rooms, with many on the waiting list. We have 19 children. Some are orphans, others are abandoned and the rest have parents incapable of taking care of them. There are 17 staff members. Nuns manage the facility and a priest takes care of the spiritual needs and the sacramental life of the residents. This service is not restricted to Catholics. It is open to all. It runs partly on charity. Families that have the means, pay. Those who cannot afford payment for their loved one, or those who have no one to care for them, are taken in on charity. Because of the need for this service, we decided to expand the facility. We have started construction.

Archbishop Edward Weisenburger got interested in our vision and the project when I shared it with him last year. He invited me to the Archdiocese to visit three parishes, to share this vision with parishioners and to solicit for your financial support.

I thank you in anticipation for your support and pray that we may all realize how much God loves us, one and all, and to strive to grow in our love of God and love of neighbour. Peace be with you all!