

**ADDRESS OF WELCOME PRESENTED AT THE ONE YEAR
ANNIVERSARY OF EKWULOBIA DIOCESE AND FUND RAISING FOR
DIOCESAN PROJECTS ON MARCH 5, 2021 AT THE ST. JOSEPH
CATHEDRAL PODIUM, EKWULOBIA**

Your Excellencies, the Archbishops and Bishops
Rev. Frs. & other consecrated persons
Your Excellency, the Executive Governor of Anambra State
Members of the Legislative Houses – Federal and State
My Lords, temporal
Honorable Commissioners,
Members of the Academia
Traditional Rulers and Presidents General
Knights of the Church & their Ladies
Distinguished Guests
My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

On this day, exactly one year ago by 12 noon, the creation of this diocese was made public. Many of us remember where we were and **what** we were doing when we got the news because it was a landmark event for us. But the inauguration of the diocese and the installation of the first bishop were done with a select few in attendance. Then, the hype about the COVID-19 pandemic was so high.

One year down the road, the world has adjusted to a new normal as regards the pandemic. Putting all the safety protocols in place, we have gathered to give thanks to God for this marvelous gift. We have celebrated the Eucharist, the highest way to express our thanks to God. We have come to this second part of the event to make merry, to appreciate those through whom God gave us this great gift and finally to raise funds for diocesan projects.

What culminated in the creation of Ekwulobia Diocese started much earlier. The then Bishop of Awka – Most Rev. Simon A. Okafor, of blessed memory, took the first step. The request was renewed by his successor – Most Rev. Paulinus C. Ezeokafor. The metropolitan Archbishop of Onitsha, Most Rev. Valerian Maduka Okeke and the Bishops of the Province endorsed the request as well as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). The Nunciature was involved all the way. We therefore thank in a special way the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi, for his contribution and for making out time to come and celebrate with us. Of course, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, deserves our gratitude. This gift came to us from God through him.

We thank and congratulate the St. Joseph Cathedral Parish community Ekwulobia. Their magnificent parish Church has become the Cathedral Church.

A newborn baby has many needs. As a young diocese, our needs are many. They include:

- (i) Secretariat Complex so that we vacate the classroom block we are using now so that our pupils will have a more conducive atmosphere for learning.
- (ii) We need a Spiritual Year Seminary and Formation Centre for ongoing formation of the priests and lay faithful before we can get a Retreat, Pastoral and Conference Centre.
- (iii) St. Dominic Savio Seminary Akpu needs science laboratories so that it effectively run the senior secondary programme.
- (iv) The priests working at the chancery need accommodation.

Our time may be bad but our lives should redeem it (Eph. 5: 16). Our fathers in the faith passed through hard times but persevered. St. Paul gives us an example in 2 Cor. 8: 1 – 8: “Now I want you to know about a gift of divine grace among the Churches of Macedonia. While they were so afflicted and persecuted, their joy overflowed and their extreme poverty turned into a wealth of generosity. I can testify that they gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, spontaneously; they asked us with much insistence *for the favour of having a share in helping the holy people*. This was far beyond anything we had expected; they put themselves at the disposal of the Lord and of us by the will of God....This is not a command; I make known to you the generosity of others to test the sincerity of your love by your fraternal concern”.

Let us take to heart the following wonderful advice of Tobit to his son Tobias (Tobit 4: 5 – 20): “My son, always remember the LORD, Our God... Give ... in proportion to the amount you have; if you have much, give much, if you have little, **do not be afraid to give something from the little you have. In this way you are storing up treasure against the day of tribulation,....In all circumstances bless the LORD; ask him to make your ways straight and bring your plans and projects to a successful end....”.** God will fulfill his promises to all who believe in his words.

My dear brothers and sisters let us show what our religion is worth to us today. The Lord has requested it. Challenge God and see how He will open the flood gates of heaven for you and pour out an abundant blessing for you (**Malachi. 3: 8-10**).

We thank you for honoring our invitation and pray God to lead you safely home thereafter and protect you from all harm – Amen.

Chief Sir (Dr) J.J Ezeokafor KSG
1st Vice Chairman, Diocesan Pastoral Council

Rev. Fr. Lawrence Nwankwo
Diocesan Chancellor

Most Rev. Peter Ebere Okpaleke
Diocesan Bishop