



“I THANK YOU, GOD, WITH MY WHOLE HEART” (Ps 9:1)

2026 New Year Message of His Eminence Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke to the Faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia and all People of Good will

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I wish you all a happy New Year! We are grateful to God who brought us into 2026. No one can take this for granted especially in our present Nigerian context. Life is indeed like grass, fresh and supple in the morning but dried up in the evening (Ps. 103:15-16; Is. 40:6-7; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). The insecurity in our land makes this imagery very real. Those not felled by bullets, are slowly poisoned through adulterated products – food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, snacks and even pharmaceuticals – produced and distributed by callous individuals who disregard the health and life of others in their pursuit of profit. The socio-economic environment is also very challenging. In short, we have survived another year. We thank God.

As we thank God and reflect on who we want to be in the New Year, I propose something counter-intuitive. I propose cultivating an attitude of gratitude; becoming grateful persons. May we aim at living out a Eucharistic spirituality, a spirituality of thanksgiving. This will not only impact positively on our lives as individuals but also on our communities and on our practice of the faith.

As an attitude, gratitude is a way of being and perceiving oneself in the world. At the basis of this attitude is an acknowledgement that one is not self-sufficient. No one is an island. No one is self-made. Everyone depends on the good will and sacrifices of others to live and to flourish. Everyone is a gift from God, wrapped in packs of different colours and sizes, and given to others and to the world at large.

Our dependence on God is obvious. As the author of our earthly life, we owe everything to God. In Him, we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28). By God’s providential arrangement we are led and spared from harm. All things being equal, we effortlessly draw in air that sustains life. When thirsty, we drink water. In the heat of the day, we cherish the amazingly revitalizing effect of a shower. Above all, the gift of Jesus Christ, the light of the world,

whose birth we celebrated at Christmas, shows us God's love. This love is ground of our identity and hope. We do not fear even if we should walk in the valley of death, because we know that God is with us (Ps 23:4). Whatever the situation – merited or unmerited, happy or painful – we accept it, because we know that God's ways are not our ways (Is 55:8-9) and everything works onto good for those who love God (Rom 8:28). To grow in gratitude, we must keep in mind this abiding care of God and consciously count our blessings, as it were, one by one.

One of God's blessings is the gift of other persons. Despite interpersonal, intra- and inter-familial challenges, life would have been bland and impossible without other people. *Ọchị otu onye na-ere eze* (the laughter of one person leads to fake smiles) - the Igbo say. We have food on the table thanks to the farmer and all the service providers, who moved the produce from the farm to the market and to the table, ready for consumption. This is only one example. Others can be traced for every need satisfied or service rendered. These show that individuals are nodes in a network of relationships with many in the network being anonymous. Interestingly, many in this network are assigned to the bottom of the social ladder. Yet, they are indispensable links in the chain that sustains even the high and the mighty. The fact that such services are paid for does not diminish the indebtedness because they could have chosen to adulterate the product or offer haphazard services that will endanger lives. Acknowledgement of this interdependence blossoms into appreciation of all who contribute to our well-being. It also demands a commitment to be our best for others.

In sum, to become a grateful person entails commitment to some key perspectives. First, God providentially cares for all, even in moments of difficulties. Second, there is nothing that we have that we have not received (1 Cor 4:7). Third, the self and whatever we are or have received are not for ourselves alone but for the good of all. Life is not to be lived in competition but in cooperation with others. Informed by these, we are then to be grateful for the daily acts of kindness and processes that sustain life as we make effort to contribute to such processes. With these thoughts, I commend you to the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary as we set out on our journey in 2026.

Peace be with you!