

“YOU, LORD, ARE THE RULER OF ALL” 1 CHRON. 29:12

Homily of His Lordship, Most Rev. Peter Ebere Okpaleke, on the Occasion of the Celebration with Consecrated Persons on February 3, 2022, at St. Joseph’s Cathedral Ekwulobia

1. Welcome

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is with joy that I welcome you to this year’s celebration of the World Day of Consecrated Life. We have gathered as the family of God for the Eucharist. In other words, we have come together primarily to thank God for the gift of our vocation to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. It is God who has called us and sent us out, not just as individuals but as members of the Church community and then of different communities with our different charisms to spread the Good News and to renew the face of the earth. In the Gospel today, we heard about how Jesus sent his disciples out in twos and charged them to take nothing for the journey, except a staff – no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses, etc. We shall come back to these. First, let us reflect on the responsorial psalm which provides us with the condition for the possibility of the radical discipleship that Jesus demands of us and has called us to.

2. “You, Lord, are the Ruler of all”

The Responsorial psalm is taken from 1 Chronicles 29:10-12. It celebrates the sovereignty of God. God is the ruler of all. This was proclaimed by King David and verified in the episode narrated in which he thanked God in the words used for the responsorial.

In 2 Samuel 7, we read about David’s desire to build a temple to the Lord and his conversation with Nathan the prophet about that. Initially, Nathan supported him and then came back the next day to tell David that it was not for him to build the temple but for his son to do so. That was all that the book of Samuel says about David’s desire to build the temple of the Lord. In the book of Chronicles from which the responsorial is taken, we are given additional information. David made elaborate preparations for the building of the temple. He brought together the building materials to be used in the construction. Above all, he gathered the whole of Israel and told them, “my brothers and my people, listen to me; I have set my heart on building a settled home for the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, ...but when I was ready to build it, God said to me, ‘You must not build a house for my name, for you have been a man of war and have shed blood.’ ... Furthermore, he has told me, ‘Solomon your son is the man to build my house and my courts.’” (1 Chron. 28:2, 6) After announcing this, David made his own offering for the construction of the temple, “three thousand talents of gold, seven thousand talents of refined silver.” Finally, he asked the

people “who is willing to devote himself to Yahweh’s service today?” It was because of the generous donation of people, an expression of their readiness to devote themselves to God’s service, that David used the words to praise and thank God:

“Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel, our father, forever, for ages unending

Yours, Lord, are greatness and power and splendor, triumph and glory. All is yours, in heaven and on earth.

Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom, you are supreme over all. Both honour and riches come from you.

You are the ruler of all, from your hand come strength and power, from your hand come greatness and might.”

These are powerful words; deep expressions and acknowledgement of the greatness and sovereignty of God from a man David, at the evening of his life gradually handing over to his son Solomon.

3. Divine Sovereignty and Consecrated Life

All Christians, more so, all consecrated persons, are supposed to take up David’s song and celebration of the sovereignty of God. First of all, every Christian is a partaker of the divine mystery because of a choice made by God before the foundation of the world. This is the message of St. Paul in the Letter to the Ephesians: “God chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and blameless before him, marking us out for himself beforehand, to be adopted sons through Jesus Christ.” This is the vocation of every Christian and for us consecrated persons, this choice has translated into a radical response which is still an acknowledgement that *Chukwu ka*, God is supreme. The acknowledgement of the sovereignty and supremacy of God made David want to construct the house of God and even when he was debarred from doing so, he went ahead and brought together the materials that would be used for it.

The fact that David made provisions for the temple project in spite of the fact that history would not remember him as the builder of the temple shows clearly the type of person he was and his motivation for the project. Some leaders would not complete projects started by their predecessors because it would amount to promoting the predecessor who initiated the project. Others will go the other extreme of commissioning uncompleted projects so that their names would be on the plaque. There was a leader in ecclesiastical circles, who started commissioning projects at the end of the tenure. This was done by plastering

and painting the part of the building where the tape would be tied, and the plaque placed. On record, it would be stated that Project X was commissioned by Leader A while Leader B who succeeded him or her had still to spend so much to complete the project. In other words, Leader A takes credit for Project X at the cost of Leader B who would appear to be spending on a project that had been commissioned and one would rightly presume to have been completed. This was not the case with David. He made provisions for the temple project. As happens often, the historian of the book of Samuel and Kings, did not document David contribution to the temple. They ascribed the temple project totally to Solomon. But the Chronicler set out to restore the balance.

I know that some would feel that what I have said above does not concern them since they do not see themselves as in any leadership position. This is far from the truth. Indeed, at stake is how one sees oneself within the providence of God. God directs history through human agency. One could see oneself as servant of divine providence. Thus, one strives to do one's best in whatever position one finds oneself seeking to further God's will. Such a person knows that every situation, however lowly one may think it is, is an opportunity to cooperate with God to achieve God's purpose. Such a person knows that life is not about him or her. We are supposed to be servants of God, servants of life.

There are on the other hand, people who feel that life should serve them, or that God should serve them. They have a high sense of entitlement. They feel they are entitled to the best of everything – health, wealth, position, etc. Being sent to parishes or communities in rural areas make them angry because they feel that those in urban centres are preferred against them; that they are not considered among the best. Instead of seeking, finding and giving themselves to fulfilling God's will where they are, they just mark time, angry with everybody.

Others who feel that life should serve them, work very hard but because their effort is fueled by the desire to project themselves and make their mark on the sand of time, they go out of their way to outshine their predecessors and to undermine their successors. Some go to the extent of introducing false notes in the narrative or history of their community or apostolate in order to diminish the efforts of their predecessors. Others provoke debates and controversies, etc, to make the situation more difficult for their successors.

The bottom-line is that they want to remain the best; they feel that life is primarily about them. Unfortunately, it is not. As the Psalmist put it: "Not to us, not to us, but to God's name give the glory" (Ps 115:1). That is what is meant when we say, "You, Lord, are the ruler of all." It is an acknowledgement that

we are supposed to be in God's service doing all in our power to project God and His loving purpose of salvation. Unless and until we grow into this level of consciousness and acceptance of the sovereignty of God, we would not make ourselves totally available to God to achieve the divine purpose through us. This is what I mean at the beginning by saying that acknowledging God as Lord is the condition for the possibility of discipleship and fruitful apostolate.

4. "He sent them out in Pairs"

In the Gospel today, we heard that Jesus sent them out in pairs. *Okwa si na ihe ha ji adi abuo abuo bu ihe otu onye ahughi, ibe ya ahụ ya (anya ahughi, anya ahụ).* This saying from the wisdom of *ndi Igbo* underlines the pragmatic reason for the pairing. But Jesus means a lot more than this. He wants to underline the fact that human beings are persons in communion not just individuals who decide to enter into or not to enter into relationship with one another. He wants to highlight the truth that we are created in the image and likeness of God who is a Trinity of persons – Father, Son and Spirit – who are bound together in love. Community life, which as consecrated persons you embrace in addition to the evangelical counsels, is thus in imitation of the Trinity and a witness to the deepest truth of our being as human beings – I am because we are.

Community life is not easy both for members of biological families as well as religious families. This is because of difference. *Ka ihu anyi si di iche iche, ka echiche anyi si dikwa iche iche.* The difference in orientation and vision gives rise to the challenge of how to make the many one while respecting their particularity. This is where growth in love and development of a common vision becomes very necessary. By this everyone will know that you my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:35). I will therefore want to remind you of this important truth. In as much as you engage in various apostolates, remember that you are called to bear witness to God's love.

5. The Apostolate

Just as the disciples were sent out in pairs, you have been sent as communities to work in the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia. We are grateful for all you do in the various places of your apostolate. **We want also to know what other areas of the apostolate you may like to engage in. That is why a form was sent out to you and asked for prospective apostolate you might want to engage in, given the need of where you work. We are grateful that you have filled and returned the form. We also tried to get the views of the parish priests as regards possible new areas they might want you to engage in.** Hopefully, in

the interactive section, we will cross fertilize ideas, sharpen our visions and come to renewed ways of engagement.

I guess you have received this information before. **Let me repeat it and ask for your continued help. Our focus this year, as a diocese, is on children. We want to catch them young. We also want to keep them.** That is why we want to make use of audio-visual aid in our formative intervention in their lives. Every parish has been mandated to procure and use audio-visual aid in catechesis and in packaging other formative experiences for children. The aim is to plant the Church firmly in the imagination of these children and also to support parents and schools in their difficult task of forming the young. **Many of you work are in the school apostolate. Have that aim also in your work. Give children a positive experience of the Church so that they maintain an open attitude to her and the Good News she proclaims.**

6. Synod on Synodality

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has convoked a synod on Synodality. This is a synod with a difference. We are invited to review our vision of the Church and our relationship within her bosom and with the rest of the world. The watchword is ‘journeying together.’ We all are journeying together within the Church and with the rest of the world. This calls for listening with our hearts to one another within the Church and listening to the world at large – sifting out and appropriating what is good, sharing in the joys and pains of the world and engaging in the mission given to the Church of announcing the Good News of God’s love for humanity and gift of His only begotten Son for our salvation.

I had appointed Rev. Fr. Wenceslaus Ofojebe, the Coordinator of the Synod in our diocese. Priest coordinators had also been appointed at various deaneries. The contributions and deliberations for the synod should be an upward movement from the zones to parish to deanery, and then to the diocese. We recall that the Chancellor – Rev. Fr. Lawrence Nwankwo, had made presentations on the Synod on Synodality on the day of inauguration of the 2021/2022 pastoral year and closing of the year of St. Joseph respectively. Please do your best to be part of the synod at your respective place of apostolate.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, let me thank you again for all you are doing and challenge you to continue to grow in your appreciation that the Lord is the ruler of all. Dispose yourself to be ruled by Him. Be still and know that He is God (Ps 46:10). Be grateful to Him, be confident and content. Do not be afraid. Allow God to lead. God knows the way. Trust God to provide for you as you go out without spare tunic, haversack or copper for your purses. He is our trust and stronghold. Allow God to hold you by the hand.



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