



## **The Healing of Nigeria Has Started with the Re-consecration of the Country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

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### **THE HEALING OF NIGERIA HAS STARTED WITH THE RE-CONSECRATION OF THE COUNTRY TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY**

By

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Nigeria, as it is today, and in the opinion of many, is a troubled country. As appropriately captured by Peter Cunliffe-Jones' book: *My Nigeria: Five decades of Independence*, this troubled giant of Africa, vast in size, rich in contrast, and vibrant in citizenry, is a country full of hurts. Its complexity keeps growing daily. In the last few years,

Nigeria has been turned into a huge theatre where absurdities flourish freely. This in itself captured the attention of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), during their Second Plenary meeting, September 7-15, 2017, in Jalingo, Taraba State, where they deliberated extensively and noted in their communiqué issued at the end of the meeting that: "Our country is currently passing through a phase that is marked with tension, agitation and a general sense of hopelessness and dissatisfaction." They further observed in the same communiqué that "there are agitations in many sectors of the country against the one-sidedness in appointments to key institutions and sensitive national offices, against marginalization, and unfair distribution of resources and amenities. There are also allegations of cases of selective application of the rule of law." The CBCN attributed the anomalies in the Nigerian system of governance "as a result of years of injustice, inequality, corruption and impunity."

On his own part, Karl Maier, a British Journalist, wrote a book with the curious title: *This House Has Fallen*. The book describes Nigeria as "a byword for chaos and corruption." It goes further to present the country as a country that has proved to be by far the most confounding, frustrating, and at the same time engaging place..." The book says Nigeria "simply overwhelms the senses, one of those rare examples in which the sum of its parts is, at least to date, immensely greater than the whole. It is a work in progress though one is never too sure whether it is being assembled or torn apart."

With all the realities of imperfections of the Nigerian nation one is convinced that Nigeria is still a 'work in progress', God has not finished its work on her. The fact still remains that every genuine Nigerian must not give up hope in the project called Nigeria. The hope in the emergence of a new Nigeria was re-invigorated by the CBCN in their latest communiqué when they made a passionate appeal to all Christians and the rest of Nigerians not to lose hope but look at themselves and the country in a better light. In their own very words, "much cheering news abounds in the land amidst the suffering and hardship, the pain and the feeling of helplessness. We are hopeful that Nigeria will survive the present hardship and will become better for it. And our hope does not disappoint us (Rom 5:5). We all are stakeholders in the Nigeria project. We must therefore work hand in hand with a better understanding of ourselves to build the Nigeria of our dreams." The Bishops stated in the communiqué.

However, the CBCN believes that the building of a new Nigeria which must reflect the dreams and aspirations of every Nigerian should commence with a special prayer programme designed to hand over our dear country and its people into the protective hand of God and to pray for peace, unity and reconciliation among Nigerians. This explains the reason why the Catholic Church in Nigeria declared the year 2017 as Marian Year, in honour of the Centenary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Fatima, Portugal to be concluded with the re-consecration of Nigeria to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Benin City from the 12 to 14 October, 2017.

The ceremonies put together to conclude the National Marian Year and to re-consecrate Nigeria to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Benin City which was the high-point of liturgical gathering of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, provided the opportunity for a providential moment of soul searching and intercession for Divine Mercy. About 55, 000 people were in attendance. The celebration was led by the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev Ignatius Ayau Kaigama alongside 53 other Bishops, over 1000 Priests and 2000 Religious. Also present at the ceremony was the Governor of Edo State, Mr. Godwin Obaseki and his Deputy, Mr. Philip Shaibu, their wives, as well as many top Government functionaries from within and outside Edo State.

“The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria envisioned this national day of prayer dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary as our own way of marking the culmination of the centenary of her apparitions to the three shepherd children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta. Our celebration began with the declaration of a year-long period of Marian prayers and devotions, culminating with the re-consecration of Nigeria here in Benin City on this 13th Day of October with declaration by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, of a Jubilee Year in honour of the Centenary of the Marian apparitions in Fatima beginning from the 27th of November 2016 till the 26th of November 2017.” Archbishop Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria(CBCN), had explained in his address during the re-consecration Mass in Benin City.

The re-consecration of Nigeria to the Immaculate Heart of Mary marks the beginning of the journey towards national restoration which has seen the commitment of everyone, especially Catholics in Nigeria towards nation building. The

essence was to entrust Nigeria to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Nigeria, and to ask her to intercede on our behalf to stabilize the Nigerian ship of state and to obtain for us all the blessings and graces that we need as a nation.

Archbishop Kaigama who welcomed everyone for braving the odds to come to Benin City not minding the economic recession that has diminished their financial capacity, as well as the long rough and bad roads and even the inconveniences of spending two to three days on pilgrimage noted that “coming together in such numbers to celebrate our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is a testimony that the Marian year has borne positive fruits in parishes across the country.” “I wish to thank you all as you come from all parts of the country: from the Creek areas of the Delta to the mountains of Mambila Plateau; from the far Northern cities bordering the Sahara to the city of Lagos and others lying on the mouth of the Atlantic Ocean. This demonstrates that we are one big family of God in Nigeria on mission. On behalf of the over 70 Bishops of the Nigerian Church, together with the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, we welcome you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in honour of the BVM.” Kaigama remarked.

Speaking further, The CBCN President declared: “We are convinced that anything our Blessed Mother asks of Jesus for us will be positively granted to her. We are therefore, propelled by faith and animated by the love of Mary to boldly ask God to heal Nigeria. We are convinced beyond doubt that as Abraham pleaded with God not to destroy Sodom (cf. Gn 18), so will God not destroy our land. As Nineveh repented and was spared, so shall Nigeria be spared. We have the word of the Lord Himself when He declared, if “my people who bear my name humble themselves and pray and look for me, and turn from their wicked ways then I myself will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and restore their land” (2 Chr 7:14).”

Tons of prayers were stormed to Heaven in the two days sprit-filled eventful programme with candle light procession for the specific intention of God’s intervention and healing for Nigeria.

In his concluding remarks, the CBCN President, reminded everyone present that “We have the privilege every

October 1st to celebrate the Independence Day of Nigeria and also the Solemnity of our Lady Queen and Patroness of Nigeria from whom we have so much to learn: her tender motherly care, her tranquil faith disposition, her social sensitivity, her humanitarian concern and her fervent intercession to her beloved son Jesus. She alerted Jesus about the married couple and their guests in Cana concerning their lack of wine. We too in Nigeria are lacking wine, not intoxicating wine - which we have in abundance, but the wine to stimulate our social sensitivity to improve the socio-economic conditions of our people and to see the need to be our brother and sister's keeper. With its enormous blessings both human and natural, Nigeria should be able to change stones into bread, provide enough potable water and manna for the people as Israel enjoyed in the desert; cure people's illnesses like Angel Raphael did instead of rushing abroad for medical treatment; give good education to youths the type Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego received (cf. Daniel 1); provide better and easier means of transportation across the length and breadth of this nation; use our resources so prudently and with charitable consideration for others irrespective of tribe, religion or political leanings, in a manner that it becomes unnecessary and unpatriotic for any one or group to seek to leave the country or asking others to leave a certain part of Nigeria. What is very necessary is the equitable distribution of wealth, political appointments, infrastructural development and the prudent use of our resources by leaders."

It must be noted that trusting Nigeria to Mary, Mother of God goes along with some serious responsibilities on the part of Christians especially Catholics which includes praying the rosary daily, amending one's life, avoiding anything that can trigger crisis or conflict, avoiding sins of the flesh, immodest dressing, sinful and unfaithful marriages, sexual immorality, artificial contraception, acts of abortion, etc. It requires praying, repenting, fasting, being an instrument of peace and developing a Marian dimension in one's expression of Christian faith. Indeed Mary calls everyone to change their lives and to break completely with sin which grieves God.

In the end, the signs that followed immediately after the re-consecration prayers for Nigeria were said, many believe, it was an indication that God has answered their prayers for the nation. Instantaneously, there was a heavy downpour of rain after which followed a clear weather of sunshine and the changing colour of the 'dancing sun'. This unusual phenomenon gladdened the hearts of the pilgrims at the venue of the celebration as many of them testified

that what they saw is reminiscent of Fatima experience in 1917. Indeed, the great jubilation of participants at the sight of these signs clearly showed in the enthusiasm of their faith that Nigeria will no longer be the same any longer.

With the national spiritual gathering of Catholics all over Nigeria in Benin City to re-consecrate the country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary over, it is believed that God has started the process of healing our land and the citizens of Nigeria which is made of different cultures and tribes.