

ST. GERTRUDE THE GREAT NEWSLETTER

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FROM BISHOP DOLAN

My dear Friends,

I am preparing this Newsletter on Mission Sunday, and could think of no more fitting theme than the life and conversion of our latest missionary, Father Bede Nkamuke, who returns to his native Nigeria at the end of November. Your kind offering will help to cover his costs and give him a little something once he gets started restoring the Catholic Faith which the good Irish Missionaries planted 125 years ago!

God reward your mission consciousness!

– **Most Rev. Daniel L. Dolan**



Father Nkamuke poses with Bishop Dolan following his ordination at Most Holy Trinity Seminary's chapel in November, 2013.

My Journey to the Priesthood

*Transcribed from a talk given by Father Bede Nkamuke
at St. Gertrude the Great Church on Rosary Sunday,
October 5, 2014*

This is an account of my journey to the priesthood. But before I talk about myself I would like to say a little about my country Nigeria.

Nigeria is a West African country located just north of the equator. Lagos itself is just 444 miles from the equator. It is the most populous country in Africa and the eighth most populous country in the world. Of this population only about 14% are Catholic, the rest being 49% Muslim, 36% Protestant, or various Pagan religions which make up a tiny 1%. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups, speaking different languages. The three major ethnic groups, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, have English as their official language. And in fact, we are the third largest English speaking country in the world, after India and the United States.

The Catholic religion first came to the area now called Nigeria in the sixteenth century with the Portuguese. But it did not really take root until the late nineteenth century, when the Society of African Missions and the Fathers of the Holy Ghost came to evangelize the country. The Fathers of the Holy Ghost were Irish, and these sons of St. Patrick did such a good job that the southeastern and south regions are now mostly Catholic (about 96%). We have in fact as our patron saint of Nigeria no other than St. Patrick. So I can say that I am Irish by induction. Because evangelization came so late to Nigeria (between 1884 and 1889), we were not prepared for the havoc caused by the Vatican II.

I am from the Mgbidi in Imo State, in the southeastern region of Nigeria. My tribe is Igbo which is also called Ibo because the white men who came could not say the word Igbo. My language is also called Igbo. I was born on December 27, 1981 and my name is Nkamuke Okechukwu Bede. Nkamuke means “greater than misfortune”, while Okechukwu is a native Christian name which means God’s share

or gift. My family is Novus Ordo, and I am the first of four boys.

I joined the Legion of Mary in the year 1999 after completing high school. Because our duty involved talking to non-Catholics about the Faith, we were compelled to study Catholic doctrine. I had thought about becoming a priest, as far back as 1995, but my Novus Ordo priest-uncle, told me to wait until I was done with my university studies, so I could have better “bargaining power.” I enrolled at the Federal University of Technology, which is in Owerri in the year 2001, to study material and metallurgical engineering.

In 2003, my third year of university studies, I heard about the Tridentine Mass for first time . This happened when I joined the Confraternity of Mary, Queen of All Hearts, which is based on the doctrine of St. Louis De Montfort. Let me add here that my school, being located in the southeastern part of the country has a very strong Catholic presence, and a relatively conservative Catholic life. For example, the majority of the Catholics who live on the campus would come for night prayer, which consisted of a Catholic hymn, spiritual talk, and the recitation of the rosary. We also had rosary processions on the first Sunday of each month.

At the weekly meeting of the members of the Queen of All Hearts we would say some prayers and the more informed among us would talk about the life of a saint or explain some Catholic teaching. We learned how these saints would devoutly assist at or say the Mass. I soon began to wonder how the saints could have found such peace in the “Mass” as I knew it then. As we know it is absolutely impossible to concentrate in the New Mass, simply because it was designed so that you can participate “actively” in it. We tried to be devout at the New Mass, but it didn’t work. For example we resolved not to extend our hands at the Sign of Peace, or to clap while others were clapping. This is easy enough to do when you have friends around you doing the same. But often we were scattered around the church causing us to look odd and out of place. We also resolved not to receive Communion from the hands of “non priests.” So we were always calculating to see where

we would stay so that the priest would come to us first. But we were not always successful. Together with a handful of other boys we resolved to study about this issue. It soon dawned on us that there really was an older Mass, the so called Tridentine Mass. We also found out that, there was an indult Mass (offered by the Fraternity of St. Peter) about an hour away. We decided in the year 2005 to go there whenever we could afford to do so. The priest was quite pleased to see us and explained to us about the traditional Latin Mass. I must say that my own first experience at the traditional Mass was not as dramatic as I expected it would be. It felt more like I have found my place at last. Although it was the indult Mass, and likely invalid because of the questionable ordination of the priest, still it was everything I expected to see and more. We continued to attend this chapel. Here we kept going until further study showed us that the problem went beyond *which* Mass you attended. At this point we met a former Augustinian priest, Father Gregory Obih, who was learning to say the traditional Mass at the Fraternity of St. Peter’s chapel. We were quite happy when he left for Gabon and the Society of St. Pius X Seminary, and then to Switzerland for conditional ordination. For the duration of 2005 we eagerly awaited his return to Nigeria and even stopped going the indult Mass.

About this time, after further reading and further investigation, we were brought into contact with sedevacantism. I had read Father Cekada’s book on *The Problems with the Prayers of the Modern Mass*, but I had no idea that he was a sedevacantist. I remember wondering how anybody could be crazy enough to believe the sedevacantism nonsense. However, after I read the brief but succinct response of Father Cekada (to his opponents), I found no difficulty in making the switch to sedevacantism. The arguments were clear enough. Having been convinced, and based also on these findings, we also stopped our association with the SSPX. It was therefore a disappointed Father Obih who returned from Switzerland to find that we had moved on to sedevacantism. I ask, however, that you continue to pray for Father Gregory.

Having made this decision we wondered how to explain this to our parents and what exactly we were to do. Our coordinator got in touch with Bishop Dolan and Father Cekada and sought their advice on how we were to conduct ourselves in this quite unusual situation. Help was not long in coming. His Excellency responded on February 24, 2006 telling us what to do. Following his advice to the letter, we met to say the rosary, the Divine Office (Compline), and we recited the Athanasian Creed daily. We made handouts and pamphlets posting them both within and outside the campus. One handout for example, compared some Vatican II teachings with the true teaching of the Catholic Church, We went as far as placing our pamphlets on the cars of people while they were attending the New Mass.

And yes, we did face opposition, but we were drunk with zeal and didn't care. Our Novus Ordo friends even began to have "Masses" offered for our conversion as well as to pray for us. Sadly we found ourselves becoming estranged from our friends. We were stopped from using the church school building for prayers. But the most difficult challenge was my own immediate family. "There is strength in numbers" says an Igbo adage, but when you are alone before your entire family, it is a very different matter. When my priest-uncle discovered that I had stopped attending the New Mass he did all he could to get me back. He would call me every Sunday to ask if I went to church. I began to dread Sundays just because of his call. He meant well but knew little about the traditional Mass. Everyone in my group faced the same problem.

Meanwhile His Excellency did not forget this new addition to his flock, and very soon in the year 2007 he sent Father Eldred Leslie, of blessed memory, to give us the sacraments. It was the first time I saw a true priest. Despite his age (about 82 or 83 I think) he did not hesitate to come to us. He gave us the sacraments, answered our questions, and gave us practical advice on what to do in our situation. Father Leslie also visited us in 2008 before he was murdered in his country of South Africa in January 2009 by someone he had befriended and helped. His Excellency also sent Father Ercoli to us in 2009

and 2010, and Father Larrabee in 2011.

Meanwhile Bishop Dolan lost no time in trying to get some of us into the seminary. I was denied twice before I finally received a visa allowing me to enter the United States. I am especially grateful for the perseverance of Bishops Dolan and Sanborn. Through the good office too of Bishop Dolan, two other Nigerians are now in the seminary. Well, I became a seminarian, and the rest, as they say, is history. Bishop Dolan supported me through my seminary training. He is still supporting me and I don't think a time will come when I will not need his fatherly support. You can consider me as someone on perpetual life support!

Most Holy Trinity Seminary can be compared to a spiritual military school, where men are trained to defend the Faith in a world where evil elements have ganged up against it. Bishop Sanborn is uncompromising as you perhaps know. It was difficult to adjust to the training, but I got used to it with time. I advise those who may want to test their vocation to go to Most Holy Trinity Seminary. You cannot afford to compromise on your Faith. We need priests with zero tolerance of any error. I say without hesitation that at least in the United States, only Most Holy Trinity Seminary is strict on every point of Catholic life and teaching. When you have Bishop Dolan for a the retreat master and Father Cekada for a professor, I can't imagine what else you would want in a seminary. You only need to look at Fathers McGuire and Lehtoranta to know what I mean.

SOME EXPERIENCE AS AN ALIEN

My journey to the United States was the first time I ever got into an airplane. I remember walking with others down some hallway and wondering when we would climb the steps to the plane, only to find myself inside the airplane.

When I arrived I expected to find snow everywhere. But I was shocked to find Florida relatively warm. I did not find it hard to adapt to the food, as I never have problem with food. I noticed though that you Americans like to use lots of sugar, and that I had to get used to.

My first time at Sunday Mass, was a new experience – finding myself surrounded by a sea of white faces!

The biggest challenge I faced was getting myself understood by the younger Americans. I was trained with the Queen’s English, but I also had my special Igbo accent. Just as an example I once asked one of our altarboys here at St. Gertrude the Great to get me a rag for cleaning and he gave me a rock! I once had to eat a hot dog because it was the only food I heard correctly when I asked the vendor what food they had. This happened on the train during my return from Philadelphia.

GRATITUDE AND CALL FOR HELP

This is the story of my journey to the priesthood. The journey continues. In a few weeks I will be returning home to my people. I ask you to please keep us in your prayers. I also ask you to continue in your kindness to support us by any other means at your disposal. I am grateful to His Excellency Bishop Dolan, Bishop Sanborn, Father Cekada, and all priests who contributed to my being here. I am grateful to you too dear parishioners.

As St. Teresa of Jesus said, we are all running the race but we are doing so separately. We need one another’s prayers, but most of all priests need the prayers of the faithful.

May the Queen of All Hearts help us all us to achieve the only reason for all this struggle: to preserve the true Faith, and gain eternity in heaven with the saints. God bless you.



(Above top) Father Lehtoranta assisted by Fathers McGuire and Nkamuke, blesses the roses that are to be carried in the Rosary Procession. (Above middle) Altarboys carry the image of Our Lady of Fatima in the Rosary Sunday Procession held annually at St. Gertrude the Great Church. We were blessed with cool and dry weather – quite fitting for an autumn Sunday morning. (Above) Upon returning to the church following the Rosary Procession, the clergy paused at the rosary shrine that graces our sanctuary for the entire month of October for concluding prayers to Our Lady.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE ENCLOSED FORM AND SEND US THE NAMES OF LOVED ONES, AND YOUR OWN INTENTIONS TOO, TO REST ON THE ALTAR DURING OUR **Christmas Novena of Masses**.

Remember the power of the Mass, God’s best gift to us! Are you having a long wait or worse for your Masses? Send us your intentions and one of our poor missionary priests will offer your Mass within the month!