

THE GRACE WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME HAS NOT BEEN WASTED

Text: I Cor. 15:1-10

1 I want to make quite clear to you, brothers, what the message of the gospel that I preached to you is; you accepted it and took your stand on it,
2 and you are saved by it, if you keep to the message I preached to you; otherwise your coming to believe was in vain.
3 The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures,
4 and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures;
5 and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve;
6 and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still with us, though some have fallen asleep;
7 then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles.
8 Last of all he appeared to me too, as though I was a child born abnormally.
9 For I am the least of the apostles and am not really fit to be called an apostle, because I had been persecuting the Church of God;
10 but what I am now, I am through the grace of God, and the grace which was given to me has not been wasted.

My Homily

Your Excellencies,

My Lords Spiritual and Temporal,

The Chairman of our BoT and members of the BoT,

The Pro Chancellor and Members of the Governing Council,

Members of the Association of Vice Chancellors of Catholic Universities of Nigeria (AVCCUN),

Principal Officers of GO University,

Members of the Senate,

Members of Staff of Godfrey University and Its Group of Institutions,

Our Foreign Liaison Officer (Ms. Kantert),

Co-ordinator of GO-University Business Park Project (Mr. Andreas Gebauer),

Friends from Austria and Germany,

Friends from the United States of America,

Members of the Alumni Association,
Beloved Members of My Family
Great GO,
IEcE...One Family,
Beloved Friends,
My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It gives me tremendous joy to see you today in a very fascinating virtual world with endless opportunities for human interaction and conviviality. In a period like this in which humanity is tested beyond words, the fire of ingenuity, which the Creator kindled in a primordial breath of life, flames incandescently and reveals itself in innumerable inventions and creative activities of humans. This explains why a spiritual gathering like this is a possibility. I thank each of you profusely for taking time off a thicket of duties around your neck to attend this Holy Mass of thanksgiving.

Beloved friends, on a day like this words and ideas engage in a battle for recognition and superiority as both run like Usain Bolt seeking clothes of fresh meanings in a deep sea of the human intellect soaked in a life so colourful and incredibly fast. Words break into songs and poetry, dancing with youthful energy in the beautiful landscape of the human mind. On a day like this, the Magnificat of the gospel becomes not only the song of Our Blessed Mother but my experience and my song. As I sing the Magnificat today, my mind races back to 22 July 2000. I can recall the faces of two bishops (Bishop Gbuji and Bishop Eneja) as they unlock the keys of heaven to drench us with their episcopal prayers like the rain in the month of July. I can still see the uncountable throng of priests and worshippers reminiscent of the imagery of innumerable worshippers in the Book of Revelation. I can still see the drummers, flutists and dancers in a celebratory frenzy. I can still see myself dancing, amidst drums and laud clangs of gongs, rattles and joyful cries, with faltering steps, having lost the natural rhythm of African dance steps during a long period of stay in Europe. I can still see the infectious smiles on the beautiful faces of my brothers, the new priests, including the auxiliary bishop of Enugu.

In this fascinating movie unfolding in my world of imagination, my soul breaks into the Magnificat: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

And the movie goes on. I recall my return from Europe after nine years of serious studies and spiritual formation. I remember the beginnings as the Provost of the Institute of Ecumenical Education. I recall vividly the excruciating sufferings, my working assiduously day and night to fix so many things at the same time: providing hostel accommodation for students who were sleeping in a very small hostel, packed like sardines and cooking in abandoned old school buses; renovating some rickety buildings that were on the verge of collapsing; constructing new buildings to decongest severely overcrowded class rooms; building new toilets and refuse dumps to clean up choking putrefaction in every nook and cranny of the compound; procuring transformers and new electric lines to stabilize very irritating epileptic electricity supplies on campus; bettering the working conditions of the staff with ridiculously low salaries; improving the quality of lecturers and their teaching, and so on. As all this movie plays uninterruptedly on the landscape of my mind, a question keeps popping on the mind's screen: But how did you do all this?

As an answer, my soul breaks into a song: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

The movie goes on. Now the birth of Godfrey Okoye University. I recall the day the licence that brought GO University into existence was signed. The endless hugs in the office of the VC of Babcock University. Then the journey to Abuja to receive the operating licence from the National Universities Commission. The evergreen memories of the boundless joys of the people of God, of friends, of countless admirers, the colourful traditional dances, mind-blowing songs of gratitude – these are ineradicable pictures. Then the nagging question: How did all this happen?

Again as an answer, my soul breaks into its song: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

In 2013 forces of darkness, the Voldemorts of this world, wanted to pause the movie of this incredibly fascinating life. The stop was packaged and delivered in the form of a devastating car accident. I can still see my car flying and landing, flying and landing like a kite eager to whisk a chick away in its ravenous hunting expedition. In these tumblings and flights, my soul was inexplicably calm, without even the tiniest spark of trepidation. Then again a question popped on the screen: How can you be so calm in a raging storm that will certainly catapult you back to your Creator at this moment?

And as an answer, my soul breaks into its song: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

Suddenly the movie breaks into a run (fast-forwarding itself) like an ostrich and stops at the 10th anniversary of GO University. The throng of humans of all shapes, sizes, colours, personalities and positions, the songs, dances, memorable words and speeches, the beautiful God-given weather, the GO University lake with possibilities for paradisiacal cruising and relaxation, variegated trees in bloom, the singing and dancing birds and trumpeting cows, nature and humans in a warm embrace and in fulfilment of the prophecies of Isaiah about the Kingdom of reconciliation and peace ushered by the sweet Lamb of God (Jesus Christ), all these are unforgettable pictures! Again the question: How are all these possible?

As an answer, my soul breaks into its song: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

It is a day of songs, of poetic outbursts, in a tranquil recollection of God's tremendous blessings and spectacular interventions in twenty 20 years full of unimaginable colours of experience. Looking back I can say: "The grace which was given to me has not been wasted."

Can I really boast about all these events and successes? No, because the picture of my unworthiness always stands tall and daring before me like an Ijere masquerade. I am the most unworthy person to boast about anything. Each time I look at myself, I have the imagery of "treasure in clay". God has chosen a farmer's son from the remote village of Anike in Ezeagu Local Government Area to do all these. He has chosen a man who in his adolescence did not go to church on some Sundays, a young boy who often slept during family prayers and thus made his mother very sad, who never served at mass before he entered the seminary. This is the man God has chosen, washed, dressed and decorated with all these achievements. So are these really my successes? No! They are the accomplishments of Christ through a very poor, sinful man. With my role model, St. Paul, I can only say today: "What I am now, I am through the grace of God, and the grace which was given to me has not been wasted."

And this is my joy. This is why my soul never ceases to sing today: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour. This is why my whole being has been transmogrified today into an ocean of poetry as I recall the

benediction of the Lord. To God our Creator be all praise, thanksgiving and adoration now and forever! Amen!

And to you my dear friends, sisters and brothers, may the grace of God given to you never be in vain. You are created for something. My prayer is that you grasp the full picture of the meaning of your existence. Like St. Paul, the focus all these years, in spite of the hiccups of a faltering wayfarer, is Christ crucified on the cross and risen from the dead. If you turn to him with all your heart, you will not only discover the full length and width of a primordially designed plan of your life but also have an unending Magnificat in your soul, even in the context of a rampaging virus: the Covid-19.

So together let us sing this song today:

My soul now glorify the Lord who is my saviour; rejoice for who am I that God has shown me favour?

Rev. Fr. Christian Anieke

This day, 22 July 2020