

3: 5: Me, Jesus and I:

The Holy Mass, Family prayer, devotions, rosary recitation, all these cannot replace the need for our personal relationship with Jesus. The Lord wants us to have a relationship of friendship with him. We are told that Moses always spoke to God as a man speaks to his friend (Ex. 33:11).

Christians must understand that being able to call God our Father, being able to speak to him face to face as Moses did, is a distinct part of Christianity. No other religion can make this claim. There is no religion whose founder offered his followers this distinctive privilege. We must not forget this point. This is why, the celebration of the Eucharist, visitation of the Blessed Sacrament must be aspects of our Catholic faith that we must understand and appreciate. We must learn to talk to Jesus about everything and anything in our lives.

There is no substitute for private prayers. Private prayers are personal to us. All family members have clothes, but everyone has his or her own clothes. When the family can afford it, children have different beds and plates, depending on their ages. Even when we eat, no one eats on behalf of another. No one can have a bath, eat, and go to the toilet on behalf of another. Our problems, our feelings are different and so, while Community prayers (The Mass), Family prayers or devotions are important, they are no substitute for private prayers. It is in private prayer that we pray for ourselves, our friends, our families, telling God what we personally feel. There is a saying in Hausa: *Ba za ka ara bakin wani ka ci albasa ba: You cannot borrow someone else's mouth to eat onions.* Or, as the Japanese say: *You cannot borrow someone else's buttocks to sit on.*

Parents often hire Private Teachers to help their children with their homework or to deepen and improve their understanding of the subjects. A good private teacher has distinct qualities: he treats the child as an individual in a way

the classroom teacher cannot do, he gently listens to the child's difficulties, he repeats until the child is comfortable and his gentle attitude helps the child. It is not a good example, but it is the same with Jesus. It is all right to be at Mass and to participate in the various community prayers at home or in the Parish. But, Jesus should be our private teacher. The Apostles asked him to teach them how to pray and He taught them to call God, **Father** (Lk 11:1).

If we make Him our private teacher, He will gently lead us through all the joys, sorrows and pains of life. He will always be there to counsel and teach us what we have not understood properly. He will help us when our minds are muddled up. For a young boy who wants to become a priest or a young girl who wants to become a Nun, we can talk to Jesus about this. For the young person who feels he or she is ready to find a wife or a husband should not be afraid to talk to Jesus or our blessed Mother, asking for help to make the right choice.

The Prayers in the Missal, the Prayer Books and other devotional books are important, but they should not replace our talking to Jesus. When we talk to Jesus, we speak the language of our own emotions. We speak the language of the moment, whether it is joy or pain that we are feeling, the anxiety of a new boy or girl friend who has ended a relationship, an examination or a job interview we are anxious about.

Very often we are tired, confused, too sad to pray or think. In these moments, let us draw inspiration from the words of St Paul who said: *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God* (Rom. 8:26) Again, when all seems to be falling apart around us, let us also

remember that on the contrary; *It is when we are weak that we are strong* (2 Cor. 12:10).

Always remember also to turn to the Bible. Very often, a chapter, a verse from the Bible can provide us all the springs of fresh water to calm our troubled minds, to help us appreciate that the Lord is indeed, our Shepherd and there is nothing we shall ever want (Ps. 23:1). Do you remember those timeless prayers like the Rosary, Angelus, Devotions, Ejaculations and so on?

3: 6: Wear your Catholic Identity with Pride:

Today, everywhere you turn, Nigerians are very proud of their identities in one form or the other. We see all of this in our beautiful traditional wears, the beads, the caps, tribal marks, foods items, and so on. We can tell where people are from by what they wear. In times past, it was somehow easy to tell who was a Catholic. We carried the rosary, the scapular, the miraculous medal and so on. But today, so much has changed and those things have almost all vanished. Fashion and modernity have displaced these spiritual artifacts. In some cases, some of us who are Catholics have problems with our identity. In a quest to be socially, politically or even economically correct, we try to hide our identities because we fear that seeing a cross could cost me a job, a contract or make me open to persecution or discrimination.

These challenges are real and they are more so here for us in Sokoto Diocese who see ourselves as a minority in an overwhelming Muslim environment. Only recently, something drastic happened in our Diocese, here in Sokoto metropolis. Some of you must have heard of the tragic story of one of our members who was physically attacked by Muslim youths for wearing a scapular and rosary. He was beaten to a state of coma by these youths. The case is still in Court but no matter what it takes, we shall see to it that Justice is done, no matter the price we may have to pay for this. The

case is in a local court and so we cannot comment on it. But, we salute this modern day martyr and we know that his witnessing to Christ will not be in vain. We stand totally by him and his right to express his identity proudly and publicly in an inoffensive manner.

As the saying goes, nature abhors a vacuum. As pride in our medals, rosaries and crosses has receded, so also have new items emerged to replace them: white handkerchiefs, miraculous oils, holy water, candles, mustard seeds, etc.

Our youth identify themselves now by donning the jerseys of their favourite Football Clubs. Today, in some Parishes, rather shamefully in my view, during the annual Harvest and Bazaar celebrations, Youths especially gather under the banner of Football Clubs such as Arsenal, Chelsea, Barcelona, Manchester United etc. rather than the banner of our saints of faith.

Today, we see that the Cross, even the statue of the Patron Saint of the Parish or the Diocese, the statue of our Blessed Mother, a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus or the Pope are not carried with pride by these same youth. We must correct this great anomaly. Catholic Christians must have an identity to welcome those who come to their homes or their businesses. Sometimes, some of us may feel that these things could scare away customers of other faiths or the Muslims. This is sad because very often, these objects could often be the beginning of dialogue of faith. A visitor, a customer might just ask, what that picture, rosary or statue represents. You should not be afraid or ashamed to explain to people who are not Catholics what the rosary or the cross are. Very often, it is ignorance that makes us afraid.

St. Peter has given us a perfect answer. He says: *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their intimidation; do not be shaken. But in your hearts, sanctify Christ as*

Lord. Always be prepared to articulate a defense to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. Respond with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who slander you will be put to shame by your good behaviour in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15).

3: 7: Bearing Witness to Jesus in spite of Difficulties.

We have tried to explain how we can properly equip ourselves for evangelization. Now, the next question is how do we witness to others, in this case, our other Christian brethren or even Muslim brothers and sisters? What do we have to say to those who do not enter our Churches, those who do not believe in Jesus? Some of us wrongly think that we cannot share the Gospel with Muslims. This is not true. Another word for the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we know, is good news.

In our daily lives, when we have good news, for example, the birth of a new child, the wedding of our son or daughter, taking a chieftaincy title, do we discriminate with giving out the information and invitation cards? Do we avoid giving the information in our place or work, to our friends and so on just because they are Muslims? We must learn to develop the courage to share the word of God. Indeed, the reason why we are not taking up this challenge as Catholic is largely due to ignorance which leads to lethargy and coldness.

Occasionally, people show off their knowledge in conversations by the way they participate in the discussion in a given subject. How often do we hear supporters of football clubs sharing the news of their victory with so much excitement, enthusiasm and exuberance? We comment on our favourite players, their skills and so on. When we watch a good film or drama for example, we like to share either the story with those who have not watched it, or the film itself if we have it. We all talk about the economy, the weather, the state of governance in our country. If we know little or nothing about football or the topic in question, we are

unlikely to be excited or participate in the discussions. Similarly, the fact that we Catholics are so quiet about sharing our faith is likely because of how little we know about the faith. We are often shy to share our faith with others because we often lack courage and enthusiasm.

After all, can you imagine, who in his or her senses can suffer flogging, imprisonment and still feel so proud? Who can wear humiliation as a badge of honour? Do you remember what happened to the Apostles? We are told: *They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them. The Apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace in the name of Jesus. Every day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:41).* It is the depth of their conviction that gave them so much courage rather than shame. No adults would have liked to speak about such humiliations.

If you were denied promotion, a job, or evicted from your house on grounds of being a Christian, how many of us can say we felt proud of this humiliation? This is the challenge we must face now. Before our very eyes, we suffer these realities every day for being Christians. We have a Constitutional right to practice our religion but yet we are denied places of worship, we are denied Certificates of Occupancy for Lands for our activities, we are denied lands even to participate in Education and Health. Yet, we must continue to do the work of God. We must continue in love to show the face of Christ and do it joyfully as men and women whose faith is based on our common humanity.

For you who are Parents and our Parishioners, we your pastors understand your travails. These States would not be the same without your sweat and dedication. You work hard, you pay your taxes and you vote. Yet, you cannot be voted for, you cannot have a job in the State civil service and you live in

difficult conditions. Your children are denied scholarships, admissions to courses of their choice, they are denied jobs when they graduate on grounds that they are not sons and daughters of the soil. When your children or wives get jobs, they are on short contracts on grounds that they are Christians or not indigenes.

These realities stare us in the face and we know that it is because we are Christians. Should we relent? No. The opportunity to work comes our way, let us put in the best we can without bitterness. Let us be inspired by St. Paul who said: *We are pressed on all sides, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body* (2 Cor. 4:9).

3: 8: Be well armed as a Catholic:

Going forward and as a fruit of this Synod, every Catholic must decide to equip himself or herself. It is no longer optional. Get yourself a spiritual reading guide. Make the effort to buy books written by priests, sisters or other lay faithful about the Catholic Church. Also, there are many Catholic websites on the Internet. With care, visit those Catholic sites, learn about the Church, the traditions, and the devotions. In this way, you and your family will deepen your faith every day. Watch those beautiful programmes on the television channel called, the Eternal Word Television Network, EWTN, established by Mother Angelica of blessed memory. It is a great source of knowledge of our faith.

Endeavour to start your day with Holy Mass. Do not complain of distance or the time of day. Make Morning Mass part of your way of committing your day into the hands of God and you will see what happens to you and your life. Get yourself a personal Prayer book and become familiar with all the prayers. Try to read the prayers of the Mass even at home

and make sure you know what happens during the celebrations. If you cannot make it to Mass, go over the readings for that day. Read about the Saint for the day.

We Catholics have been accused of not reading the Bible and this accusation should be taken seriously. It is easy to see why Catholics often fall victims to this accusation. First, our focus is the holy Mass and the Eucharist, celebrated by the Priest. So the tendency is for us to say we have *attended or gone to Mass*. This is not good enough at all. Please if you do not already have one, buy a Bible now, and make it your greatest weapon and companion. Turn to it always, whether you are well or sick, happy, sad or depressed, or you just want to let God speak to you. Your life will change and you can cope with everything because God will always have something to say to you. Remember what Moses said to the people of Israel about teaching the word of God to their children. He said: *You shall teach the word of God diligently to your children and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you sleep. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead* (Deut. 6:7).

3: 9: Our Engagement with the Secular Society:

Some of you may recall that when we concluded our Strategic Planning Session in February 2012, one of the first things we put as our priority was the construction of a new Secretariat. We all voted unanimously to make it our priority project. Happily, now we are eternally thankful to God almighty, our benefactors and all of you the good people of the Diocese for the completion of the building of this dream project, the Catholic Secretariat of our Diocese.

We dedicated our Secretariat to St. Bakhita for reasons that should be obvious to you. We honour her because of her African roots and the fact that Sudan, the country of her birth bears great significance to the Muslims of northern Nigeria. But more importantly, by dedicating our Secretariat

to her, we honour her suffering and we believe that she is a model for us as a Diocese and a people.

Now, the challenge lies before us. We give thanks to God that now, our Secretariat is open to God's glory. We have our Masses every afternoon and the blessed Sacrament is also reposed. From here, we have a platform from where we can draw inspiration so as to be able to reach all the corners of our Diocese.

The Secretariat is a symbol of our unity as a community. It is from here that we hope to follow through and execute the issues we discussed and raised during the Synod. You will recall that most of what we have written down here sounds familiar to most of you who were at the Synod or read the papers presented there. The final part of this message now is to address some outreach programmes, part of our overall pastoral programmes. Let us turn our attention now to ten key areas among many others as part of our implementation plans.

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4

IMPLEMENTING OUR PASTORAL PLAN

4: 1: A strong, effective Justice and Peace Programme.

There is need for us to intensify the work of our Justice and Peace Commission. The struggle for justice goes beyond religion and this is what we learn from the fight for freedom in the United States and South Africa. Similarly, given the injustice in our society, we have a good platform to fight the issues that attack and diminish our common humanity.

Our work with the prisons goes beyond mere visits. We must now use these opportunities to share the love of God. The idea is not necessarily to get people to become Catholics even though this is welcome. The real objective is to get people to know the love of Jesus Christ.

Our challenge now is to identify more working partners especially within the various civil society groups already working in the country. Ahead of the 2015 elections, you may recall our Town Hall meetings with the two candidates under the two leading Parties. Our hope is to continue with this engagement. We are already working in the areas of Poverty Alleviation and so on. We hope to broaden this platform to engage the larger society in areas of Health, Human Rights,

access to Justice, learning how to report human rights violation such as domestic violence and so on.

4:2: A comprehensive Interfaith Dialogue Programme:

Flowing directly from the above, we agreed to broaden and strengthen our Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue programmes. Dialogue is not about the Bishop and the Sultan sitting together in a Conference room or being shown on television. Dialogue is not something that experts do. Dialogue is life. Every day and everywhere, we are in constant dialogue as long as we are interacting in the market, in our shops, in the motor parks, on the road, in the trains, or inside vehicles.

We must develop the confidence in ourselves to be able to communicate to others. Across our different groups, whether we are professionals, teachers, businessmen, we dialogue and show the love of Christ in the sincerity we bring to our work. It will be great testimony for example to have students who trust a particular lecturer because of his or her honesty, one who does not molest or threaten or intimidate them. We expect this of our Catholic teachers.

If we do this, we are dialoguing by showing that we are Christians and we have certain values. If people experience warmth and honesty in your shop or in doing business with you, they will come back to you because of your honesty. If they do, you are leading them to Christ. We want to see you excel in public life. For example, we are quite proud that in the midst of Examination malpractices all over the country, none of our Schools or Teachers has ever been involved in Examination malpractice. This is something we are proud of and must uphold. In this way, we are helping others who want to see Jesus (Jn. 12:21)

4:3: Catholic Education for a Catholic Culture:

In 2012, Fr. Kelvin Obineche, the Parish Priest brought some of the students from our school in Ilela to interview me for their school Magazine. I remember the young girl who asked me the following question; *Bishop, Father has told us that you believe that Education is part of your programme of evangelization. I am a Muslim. How does this affect me?* Whether she framed the question or her teacher and Fr Kelvin framed it for her, it was a fantastic question which I cannot forget. In response, I told her that yes, we our Education is tied to our evangelization. But, I said to her, *if you stay in our school, you need not become a Catholic, but you will be sure that you will not be married off soon. Secondly, you could become a Commissioner, or become a Judge like Justice Aloma, the first female Chief Justice of the federation.* I still remember how her face lit up!

We want to encourage you all to ensure that your children attend our schools. We are doing all that we can to ensure that fees are not obstacles to your children getting a good Catholic education despite our lean resources. Some parents wrongly think that because the Schools belong to us, their children should not pay fees! This is wrong and cannot work. Some parents are tempted to send their children to public schools because they are cheap. So far, please note that we are still battling with the problem of religious instructions in all the Government schools here in our Diocese. So, talk to your Parish priest or the Principal of the Schools about your difficulties.

We are proposing to flag off a Five-Year-Adult Education Programme in the rural parts of our Diocese later this year. Our intention is to ensure that all our people acquire Basic Adult Literacy to enable them participate in public life. Education is the key to life and please do not be deceived into thinking that you are too old. If you believe it is good for your children, it must be good for you too. As we know, there is now a revolution in the Agricultural sector and clearly, all

farmers will require some level of basic literacy to be able to access the opportunities available. I will be appealing to all of you who are literate and can help to please step forward and volunteer. We may require just a few hours from you a week. I plead for your support and co-operation so that in another five years or so, those who are really willing will have some literacy whether they are in the rural or urban areas. I hope that the Parish Priests and the Laity Council will take up this challenge across the Diocese, no matter the numbers. We are already experimenting in Gidan Maikambu Parish.

4: 4: Our Youth, Our Future:

We are doing pretty well but we must do more for our Youth. Our area of concern should be in equipping the next generation with enough moral armour to be able to cope with their personal lives as they are growing up. Today, with boarding facilities and parents working, it is important that Youth and Children Catechesis focuses on helping our children understand the various devotions and prayers. To do this, they must be encouraged by Parish Priests, Parents, Guardians, and Catechists to connect with the Church properly.

We call on all newly elected leaders of different Laity and Pious Associations in the Diocese to make recruitment of new members part and parcel of their programmes when they assume leadership. In this way, our children can go through seamless stages of growth in the faith. From Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, they should become active in the Choir, Block Rosary and then graduate into membership of the Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria, CYON. As adulthood, they should feel confident to become Members of the various sodalities in the Parish. Our long-term goal is to ensure that membership is not even seen as an option but part of growing up as a Catholic. It is the only way they can survive when they leave home for further education here or elsewhere.

4: 5: Women as the Custodians of Society's Values:

The role of Women remains central in the society at large and the Church in particular. They are the most viable of teachers, because they are the ones who start teaching the child from birth. We therefore call on our women to renew their commitment to the family and to continue to see our Blessed Mother, Mary as their model. They are the anchors of the family. They must struggle to remain the source of hope and encouragement for their husbands who are threatened by joblessness. It is to them that their husbands should turn when things go bad and depression looms in the family. It is to them that the children turn in the course of the restlessness of youth.

We call on all women to close ranks and not focus too much on Tribal Associations or their own groups. We need very urgently to have a concrete recruitment plan for newly married couples into the Catholic Women Organisation, CWO and Zumunta Mata. We appeal to our Women to please encourage their husbands to join such Lay groups like the Knighthood or a Pious Association as a way of deepening the faith. From Block Rosary, serving at Mass, ensure that your children are not left wandering with nothing to do in the Parish. Keeping them busy with church activities is the best insurance against laziness which, problems in the home and the larger society. All of these enrich your family life.

4:6: Politics: Don't just Sit and Watch: Stand Up, Vote or Be voted For:

Nigeria's Democracy has come to stay and we must be fully engaged in it. We have chosen these parts of Nigeria as our home and we must claim our rights. You may recall that in 2015, ahead of the National elections, we had a good interactive session with the Gubernatorial candidates of the two leading parties. We hope to do more in this regard.

However, we are not to be bystanders or mere observers of the political process simply because we think we are not indigenes. We are encouraging our people, especially the Youth to go out and participate in politics. Register as Members of parties and be ready to experiment with your opportunities. Try to vote and also ask to be voted for.

As a way of preparing for a role in public life, learn now to speak in public, learn how to address even a small crowd within your group. To be relevant in public life, join an Association in the Parish, join the Catholic Youth Association. If you are a student, participate in Student Union Politics while not ignoring your studies. Volunteer when you are called upon. Take up the challenges of cleaning up the Church, your streets, your Dormitories and so on. In this way, you are learning how to serve without being paid. The future is brighter than you think. Who knows? Tomorrow, you could be a Councilor, Local Government Chairman, Senator, Governor, or President. It is important that you are fully equipped when God's voice summons you to a role in society.

4: 7: Marriage: Bedrock of the Family

For the young people who are preparing to get married, please plan well. Learn as much about the teachings of your faith, your duty as husband or wife as much as possible. Be confident in faith in the course of your married life. If you build up your faith strongly, in the end, it will not matter whom you marry, you will be able to defend what you believe. If you are well equipped, your home will become a school, a blackboard where your husband or wife and children learn from you about your faith especially if a spouse is of a different faith.

As families, please pray and pray and pray together. If you develop a sense of family prayer, you will have a chance of

praying for members of the family. You will be able to pray together for your family. God will always be a constant companion in your homes. Family prayer brings together the whole family, including those who are not physically with the family. When you have family prayers in the Morning, no matter how short, you commit the day to God. When you pray together at the end of the day, you commit the night into God's hands.

For our dear sons and daughters in particular, be careful with the company you keep. Choose your friends very well, whether they are male or female. Do not become attracted by material things unduly. Learn to work hard whether in school or at home. Talk to your parents about your friends, male or female, Christian or Muslim. Recent cases of abductions and human trafficking highlight how vulnerable our young people are. There are too many evil men and women who are on the prowl. Do not fall victim.

4:8: Self Sufficiency: An agenda for All:

It is our plan and also our hope as a Diocese that our members will be economically strong. I encourage everyone to try to find something meaningful to do, if not, the devil will find a job for you or your children. Not everyone will have to go to University and as we can see, not every University graduate has a job. Therefore, for the youth, please try to learn or acquire a skill. Try to become independent. We are all working towards self-sufficiency and the opportunities are many. Talk to your parish Priest, or visit the JDPC office for advice.

4: 9: Human Rights: We are all Human:

Things are very difficult in our country and we are experiencing different levels of discrimination in our society. The reasons for discrimination and the manifestations are also different. Students, especially female students are often

victims of sexual violence across the fabric of our society. We must learn to support one another by standing together. It is important to report cases of abuses to your friends, Parish Priest, parents or the appropriate authorities if you are in a higher institution or a place of work. This has nothing to do with Religion or class. Learn about your rights as much as possible and be ready to defend yourself. If you are young, talk to the JDPC as to what you can do and learn. We already have Lawyer Corps members who are serving with us. We hope in the future to try and help you understand your rights and how to get help.

4:10: We Your Pastors:

Finally, I appeal to all my brothers and fellow workers, all the Priests, Religious and Catechists to take up this challenge of instructions very seriously. This Document is a message, an appeal to all of us to take up this challenge which is central to our mission very seriously. It flows from what we discussed and debated at our Synod and other sessions in reflecting on our Pastoral life. This Message merely offers an appeal as to the areas that we should focus our attention on.

We hope produce a broad set of syllabus that will guide you in framing the central issues in the new Catechesis. Our main concern is a very strong Catholic Church made of a Laity that is confident and can stand on its own as witnesses to the faith. We feel intimidated or lack courage and confidence because of our limited knowledge. What we are doing here is just sowing the seeds, it is a mere beginning of a long journey. May the Lord of the Harvest guide and protect us all. May we, guided by the Holy Spirit imbibe the spirit of truth, the spirit that has sustained our faith. It is my hope as your Bishop that this document will become the basis for our learning more together. I leave you with some words of wisdom that I saw somewhere. Titled, It Depends on Whose Hands It is In, the lines go thus:

A tennis racket is useless in my hands. But a tennis racket in Ms. Serena William's hands is worth Billions of Naira. Remember:
It all depends in whose hand it is in.

A rod in my hands will keep an angry dog away.
But a rod in Moses' hands parted the mighty Red Sea.
Remember: It all depends on whose hands it is in.

A catapult in my hand is a toy and it might manage to kill a bird. But a catapult in David's hand was a mighty weapon that fell the all mighty Goliath.
Remember: It all depends on whose hands it is in.

Two fishes and 5 loaves of bread in my hand are just enough for breakfast for my family.
But two fishes and 5 loaves of bread in my Lord Jesus' hands fed thousands. Remember: It all depends on whose hands it

Nails in my hands might just cause a temporary injury.
But nails in Jesus Christ's hands produced salvation for the entire world.
Remember: It all depends in whose hand it is.

This message is now in your hands....What will you do with it?

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