

Words of Fr. Christian Anieke , Vice Chancellor, Godfrey Okoye University,
at the Symposium in Honour of His Lordship, Godfrey MaryPaul Okoye,
on the Occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Daughters of Divine
Love on 8 November 2019

Do Not Forget the Womb that Nurtured you!

My dear sisters and brothers, I am here to conclude all the soul-enriching talks and lectures we have heard at this symposium with a note of profound gratitude to God whose steadfastness the DDL celebrate today after fifty years of their existence as a congregation. I conclude these speeches by saying to all sisters of the DDL and all those who knew Bishop Okoye well or whose paths crossed with Bishop Okoye: "Do not forget the womb that nurtured you!" I am so attracted to the image of Bishop Godfrey MaryPaul Okoye as a symbol of spiritual conception and birth. Bishop Okoye was indeed a father to countless persons, families, organizations and institutions, breathing spiritual life into them.

I am here to speak about a man who connected many of us, including the Daughters of Divine Love, to God. Bishop Okoye was the womb that carried and nurtured us. It gives me deep joy to know that God, in his bottomless wisdom, willed that this very admirable man should be the Bishop of Enugu Diocese from 1970 to 1977, the founder of the Daughters of Divine Love and the man after whom the biggest academic institution of learning in the Catholic Diocese of Enugu is named, Godfrey Okoye University. At the time of the establishment of the university in 2009, no figure from the past so deserved to have the university named after him as well as be the spiritual foundation of the university as Bishop Godfrey Okoye. The Catholic Diocese of Enugu remembers with pride Bishop Okoye's contribution to the Church, education, religious life and the lives of men and women in Enugu and in the Church in Nigeria.

I am here to speak about a man of God who, during the period of the greatest crises that overshadowed the entire Nigerian nation, founded the Daughters of Divine Love Congregation. Members of the Daughters of Divine Love must understand that God was preparing them for a mission to Nigeria and the entire world when he was forming them in the spiritual womb of this great man and bishop and in a setting of trepidation and excruciating pains. A Jewish adage goes like this: "What a child says out in the street comes either from his or her father or mother". What DDL has become today says so much about the womb that nurtured them.

The death of Bishop Okoye on 17 March 1977 was the most bitter pill you ever swallowed. It was one of the most unpleasant pieces of news of the time. It brought deep sorrows to everyone, and for the Daughters, it seemed all their founder's dreams for them died with him. Life became miserable and confounding. The future looked like Coketown in Charles Dickens' novel Hard Times. The Daughters of Divine Love appeared to be disappearing into a

blackhole of inaction and nonexistence. Today the narrative has changed. Today the breathtaking growth and spread of this Congregation with multifaceted, multicoloured achievements cannot but be called a miracle, jolting us into the awareness that setbacks in life are stepping stones to success. Today, as you turn 50, you certainly realize that those initial sufferings have made you remain strong, focused and the unmistakable DDL you are. Today, as you turn 50, you must make sure that your successes continue to express your founding vision and mission, especially the spread of the aroma of divine love in every nook and cranny of the world.

I believe that after 50 years, you have got a treasure you can always fall back on: your collective and individual experiences. Aren't these experiences the reason why you chose to celebrate God's steadfastness? On the occasion of this memorable jubilee, you affirm that God is steadfast in his love and care in spite of human physical and spiritual hiccups. God has remained the robust foundation on which you stand and grow in spite of human fragility.

My beloved Daughters of the Divine Love, you have had your fair share of sufferings. You were like an orphan after the shocking event of 17 March 1977. Your experience then was comparable to that of a girl child, Abigail, who was orphaned weeks after she turned five. Abigail was the second daughter and last child of a family of five. After the burial of her parents, Abigail's uncles sent her siblings away to become house helps to other families who sheltered them. Abigail was too young to be sent to another family, so she stayed with her grandmother. Under the grandmother's guide and nurturing, Abigail grew to become intelligent and smart. She learnt to unravel sophisticated domestic and life matters and had a lot of wisdom. After her secondary school, Abigail got admission to read Pharmacy at the University of PortHarcourt. Since her grandmother could not afford her fees at the university, Abigail sought the assistance of one of her very rich uncles. This uncle called a meeting of the rest of the family members to discuss the future of Abigail. At that meeting, Abigail was told to get married to a stranger whom the uncle brought to the meeting. Abigail knew she had lost all chances of being helped by anyone when she rejected the marriage. She knew she had to weather the storm and build her life from scratch. The family's unambiguous you-are-on-your-own language did not deter her. She had a dream and she was determined not to allow financial constraints to stop her from realizing it. What she needed in order to realise her dream of becoming a professional pharmacist was courage, positive thinking and hardwork. She never missed any opportunity to develop herself. Abigail paid for her education with money she made from her petty trading. She graduated, though two years later than her mates.

I am sure the Daughters can identify with the story of Abigail. Your miraculous survival after the death of Bishop Okoye is evidence of strong nurturing and determination. Your foundation goes beyond the physical act of establishing your Congregation and of setting up canonical structures for your integration into the life of the church. A careful reading of "Godfrey Okoye's Retreat Talks" reveals the image of a father or a mother who not only gave birth to a child but who also nurtured and provided nourishment, friendship and teaching, as well as tenderly guided the steps of his or her little children in the way of Christian

discipleship. While he was founding the DDL, Bishop Okoye was thinking beyond the creation of one religious congregation. He was responding to the particular need of the country, which was immersed in a war, to build a united and reconciling community of young women aflame with the love of God. Through the DDL, he sowed a seed of love that would grow like a mustard seed into a big tree, whose branches have spread to the whole world.

Bishop Okoye gave you the most noble, enriching and prestigious definitions of human and religious life. His desire was that you become women burning with the love of God, and in fact, that you become saints. The highest honour and appreciation you could give to this noble pillar of your life is that you do not settle for mediocrity or for anything less than what he envisioned for you. Mediocrity settles for the minimum but your founder envisioned excellence for you.

The Catholic Diocese of Enugu remains grateful to this bishop who was a true shepherd of the flock of God in Enugu. He encouraged and engaged people and communities to work for God, and to willingly donate land and landed properties to the Church. The Diocese is still building on lands he acquired more than five decades ago. Godfrey Okoye University owes a huge debt of gratitude to the man who acquired the land for its main campus and whose spirituality and prayers have become the secret of its astronomical rise in academia. Nigerian is indebted to this statesman, whose peace coordinating efforts during the civil war saved the lives of many Nigerians.

My beloved DDL, as you turn 50, I read to you the famous poem of Robert Frost:

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

My beloved DDL, you have chosen to travel the road less travelled by, the road of charity and sacrificial love. And it has made all the difference. Please continue on this road and do not worry about the road not taken!

Finally, I would like to end this short speech by dropping some soul-searching questions as food for thought:

- What sense does it make being a Daughter of Divine Love if you do not have Bishop Okoye's large-heartedness, spirituality and positive actions for the good of others?
- What sense does it make being a Daughter of Divine Love if you are not filled by the Spirit of God?
- What sense does it make bearing the name Daughters of Divine Love if you are not like Christ?
- What sense does it make going by the name 'Daughter of Divine Love' if your love is not divine?
- What do you communicate to the world when your actions serve only you and not others?

Please my dearest Daughters of Divine Love, listen to your Founder as he makes a fresh appeal to you in the following words: Hear, my daughter, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head and ornaments about your neck (cf. Prov 1:8-9). Daughters of Divine Love, please do not forget the womb that nurtured you! Peace be with you! Congratulations!

Christian Anieke