

# **HOMILY FOR THE CANONICAL INSTALLATION OF ARCHBISHOP ANDREW NKEA, ARCHBISHOP OF BAMENDA ON SATURDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY, 2020 AT MANKON METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL.**

We gather this morning for this extraordinary moment in the life of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, during which the people of God will welcome their New Archbishop. Today marks the beginning of a new era in the life of the Archdiocese of Bamenda. Today we are celebrating a transition, a change of baton. Today is a very special and historic day for this Archdiocese of Bamenda. What is the Lord saying to us today as we gather here for this historic occasion? It will be important for us to remind ourselves that through this liturgy, so full of rich symbolism, we are being drawn into a mysterious, powerful and certain work of God.

The ways of the Lord are mysterious and hard to comprehend. The ways of the Lord are awesome and marvelous. Today with deep faith and reverence Our Brother Andrew accepts the mission to be pastor of the Church in Bamenda. As the third Chief Shepherd of Bamenda, he will be trending on the footsteps of two great men of the Church. He comes to continue the work of two ecclesiastical giants, the humble and saintly Paul Venzekov whose process of beatification has already been launched and the determined and hardworking bulldozer Cornelius Fontem Esua. He comes to live among you as Jesus come, as a servant.

God works in mysterious ways.

The man we welcome to Bamenda as Our New Archbishop today was born at Widikum, he was baptized in Kumbo where he also made his

first Holy Communion. He grew up in Limbe, was ordained priest for the Diocese of Buea, served as a young priest in Mbonge and Nyandong. Before becoming Bishop of Mamfe he had served as a Professor of Canon Law at the Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary Bambui and as the Registrar in Our Catholic University of Cameroon – CATUC Bamenda. This is not his Biography but this tells you that he is no stranger in the entire Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda.

The liturgical books speak about the Bishop taking possession of the Diocese. But this liturgy is referred to simply as the reception of the Bishop in his Cathedral Church. Some prefer that language because “**Taking possession**” has a vaguely military ring to it. The Bishop is simply a pastor, and it is the joy of a pastor to be received by the people of God.

Thank you for coming out in such numbers today, family and friends, clergy and the faithful of this Archdiocese, the consecrated men and women, civil and traditional authorities. You have come to receive your New Archbishop.

The rite of the installation is also intended to teach the people of God about the role and function of the Bishop in the Christian Community. The celebration tries to capture in ritual form, the nature of the Church and the relationship of the Bishop to the Church. Assuredly, there is no Church without a Bishop, but the Bishop is not the whole Church nor is the Bishop's liturgy the only indication of the sacrificial presence of God. The Bishop is above all the Shepherd of the Diocese that is entrusted to him. The Bishop is also the successor of the Apostles, Head of the Local Church, and the representative of Christ. His functions and duties are always defined in relationship to Christ the Head of the Church.

During this ceremony, the pastoral staff will be presented to the New Archbishop. The pastoral staff identifies the Bishop as the shepherd of the flock. It symbolizes the clearest duties of the Bishop, namely, **to know and care, to lead and guide, to protect and correct the flock.** Episcopal ministry is about service and not power. The Bishop is a **Servant, not a Lord, a Father not a Lord, a Steward, not a Prince.**

A Bishop in one of our neighbouring countries once remarked that a call from the Nuncio can be very, very startling to say the least. Sometimes it can mean that either you are in trouble or you are being reassigned – which means you are still in trouble. I guess that is what happened to Bishop Andrew and that is why today we are here.

It happened once to another Bishop and this is how he reacted to it:

**“All I could think of was that I didn’t want to leave my Diocese – a wonderful home for me in the past eight years where I had found so much joy and life from the wonderful faith-filled people there. But as we all know, our ways are not God’s ways.**

Then he concluded

**If it were only our ways and not God’s ways most often we would then miss out on the many graces and blessings awaiting us. It is a story of love and redemption, a story of God’s love and that story continues today. But God’s ways are not our ways, thankfully.”**

Tradition tells us that the Bishop’s ring manifests visibly that he is pledged in love to the particular Church entrusted to his care. For a Bishop the Local Church entrusted to his care is his bride. A Bishop wears the ring as a sign of fidelity to this Holy Church. He is invited to love her totally, tirelessly and completely.

The relationship of a Bishop and his Local Church is very close to a marriage. The ring I wear is a symbol of every Bishop's love for his Church. And a Bishop's marriage to the Local Church reminds me and all of us, that a Bishop is called to love his Church with all his heart, just as Christ loved her and gave his life for her.

Of course, the appointment of Bishop Andrew to Bamenda is an arranged marriage, and Pope Francis is the matchmaker. In fact our local history suggests that arranged marriages often worked at least as well as those based on romantic love. In those days when arranged marriages were common, there was an expectation that people would get to know each other and then come to love one another. Good and wise matchmaker could make surprisingly good choices.

In the Church, we believe that the Holy Spirit guides the decisions of the Holy Father. And the results are always joyful if we commit our wills to co-operating with God's plan. For any marriage to work, people need to fall in love.

What we embark on today is an arranged marriage where someone who loves you, the people of God in Bamenda. Yes the Holy Father loves Bamenda and our New Archbishop. And the Holy Father knows in his wisdom that you will make a good family together. And this requires that you make a commitment, an act of the will to love one another, to be patient with one another and to lay down your lives for one another.

Today the Apostolic Nuncio will present the Papal Bull appointing Andrew Nkea as the Archbishop of this Local Church. The Papal document comes from Pope Francis. It has Our Holy Father's seal. That document sat on Our Holy Father's table. It possesses his signature. That document is now here with us in Bamenda. And it is

that document that has brought us here. It comes from the successor of Saint Peter, to whom Jesus said

**“Peter, you are a rock and on this rock, I will build my Church and the gates of the underworld shall not prevail against it.”**

We will forever bind ourselves close to the universal Shepherd, for it is through him that we bind ourselves close to Jesus Christ.

Your Excellency, Julio Murat, your presence with us today in Bamenda brings a special closeness of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and reminds us all that we are part of the universal Church of Jesus Christ.

As the personal Representative of Pope Francis, your presence reminds us that the Church in Bamenda belongs to a single, much larger, universal family of faith guided by the Successor of Peter. So Your Excellency, we are very privileged to welcome you here today.

I said earlier, a moment ago, that the Church is a family of faith, and the father in every family has the duty and the privilege **to love, serve, provide for, protect and lead the persons in his care**. The life of a Bishop is a particular kind of Fatherhood. And the readings today describe what that Fatherhood entails.

The first reading tells us of the call of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was one of Israel's great prophets. But he had the unhappy job of speaking the truth to a nation committed to self-interest and sin. So his message was, to put it mildly, not well received. He was resented – and even hated and attacked not just by many of Israel's leaders, but also by many of its ordinary people. Yes as our first reading says God formed him in the womb, appointed him to his mission, and promised him the strength to carry it out. When God

says to Jeremiah “**Before you were born I consecrated you,**” he makes the mission of the prophet, and by extension the mission of the Bishop, something unique, personal and Sacred. This is why every Bishop has a special need for the virtues of **Faith, Courage and Love**. As Christians, and especially as priests and Bishops, we can't love God without loving and serving the people he created and entrusted to our care.

Saint Augustine was one of the human history's greatest minds. But he became one of the greatest Bishops in Christian history because he lived first and foremost as a father, moved by a Father's love.

He often said that people in his time misunderstood what is meant to be a Bishop. Some saw it as a desired honour. Others saw it as simply an administrative task. Others saw it as a step in a successful career. But for Augustine, it was a “**Sarcina Episcopalis**” – the burden of being a Bishop. He saw himself as a “**prisoner in the Lord**” because day after day he faced the concerns and problems of others, and never had time to spare for himself.

And isn't that exactly the experience of a father of a large family?

Later in life, in his ministry as a Bishop, Augustine never forget the lessons of a father's love. He never forgot that his first task was not to be a brilliant intellect, or a marvelous preacher or a great administrator or a good fund-raiser, although each of these things has a proper place in the life of a Bishop. His first task was to God, and to love the people of God in his care as a father, with a father's heart. That kind of love is tireless. It is all consuming. And without the grace of God in a man's life, it's overwhelming. Only when a man puts himself entirely in the arms of God, only when he abandons himself and his pride completely to God, only then, but truly then, the ministry of a Bishop is a joy and a liberation.

Saint Augustine once wrote to his people these words

**“Believe me, brothers and sisters, that if what I am for you frightens me, what I am with you reassures me. For you I am the Bishop, with you I am a Christian.”**

The purpose of a Bishop is to be a father to his people, a brother to his priests and religious, and a witness of Jesus Christ to the world.

Saint Augustine once wrote that any Bishop unwilling to preach Jesus Christ zealously and without embarrassment, to defend the Catholic Church with his life, and to suffer for his people without counting the cost is **“A scare crow standing in a vineyard”**. In words that sum up his whole life as a Bishop and teacher Saint Augustine said

**“It seems to me that one must bring men back... to the hope of finding the truth.”**

That is the vocation of a Bishop in the Catholic Church. That is the mandate of every man called to be a successor of the Apostles. That is the delicate mission entrusted to our brother Andrew as he assumes the duties of Archbishop of Bamenda. And to all of us gathered here, we must stand behind him with our prayers because that is the dream he comes to realize here in Bamenda.

It is very significant that the installation of our New Archbishop falls on the same day that we celebrate together the great feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle. We are celebrating the feast of a Chair. But today's feast is not merely about a piece of furniture. Today 22<sup>nd</sup> February is the liturgical feast of the Chair of Saint Peter. The Chair mentioned here is not a mere physical object but even more importantly, it is the feast of the authority of the Apostle Saint Peter, whom God had appointed to be the leader of all His disciples. Thus today's feast has a special significance, as it reminds us of the unity

that all of us Christians have with the entire Church, anchored on the person of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, who is the successor of Saint Peter the Apostle. God has established His Church upon the said foundation of Saint Peter.

The office of Peter continues in the Church, in Saint Peter's successors, the Bishop of Rome, whom we call the Pope. This is the feast then, also of the Holy Father's authority and mission of the universal Church as successor of Peter. Jesus words in today's Gospel **"You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church,"** remind us that the Petrine ministry comes from the will of Christ for the Church. And we as Catholics can appreciate that without the Petrine ministry at the heart of the Church, the Church would have been blown about by every wind of change and would have more than likely suffered from crippling disunity.

The readings of today's Mass are most appropriate not only as we celebrate this feast of the Chair of Saint Peter but also for the celebration of the installation of our New Archbishop.

When the Lord entrusts his Church to Peter, he doesn't first ask about his degrees or ambitions, but inquires about his faith and his love. Christ builds His Church not on human achievements and capacities, not on marketing strategies or organizational models, not even primarily on moral strength and virtue. We see this so well in Peter, who failed so grossly in decisive moments. He builds on people who build on him, who, despite brokenness and failure, expect all salvation and all life from Him.

As shepherds we are also under the word, and we also need forgiveness. It is our task to proclaim the Good News without fail, to keep the Church of Christ on the course of his will and law but also, at



the same time, to be with people in their struggle for growth in faith and fulfilling their lives.

Bishop Andrew you will soon sit on the Cathedra, on the chair, in doing this you assume the full time responsibilities, duties and privileges of being the Archbishop of Bamenda. We call all this as part of the fullness of the priesthood as we received at the consecration to the Episcopacy. Any fullness of the priesthood also means, fullness of problems, of challenges; But remember the more problems you have the more you become alive. So let us take every problem as a gift. It calls us to be more committed, to be more faithful and to be more brave and zealous in our ministry.

My brother Bishops, there is nothing more important for a Bishop than the care of souls. If the Church is to flourish in the world today, if we are to truly build a culture of life, holiness must begin with us.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Pope Saint Gregory the Great wrote his famous Pastoral Rule. Aside from Scripture it is the Church's best manual for Bishops. Gregory's advice was clear. A man called to Episcopal ministry must:

**“Die to all passions of the flesh and lead a spiritual life... He must put aside worldly prosperity... He must fear no adversity... He must be a man who is not stopped by a disobedient spirit... He must be moved to forgive... He must sympathize with the frailties of others... He must rely on the Lord.”**

My dear brother priests: one's priesthood should be characterized by joy. Priests of Bamenda, we are brothers in the priesthood. We are collaborators in ministry. We are stewards of God's mysteries for our people. We offer the Eucharist together today as a sign of our

solidarity in the Lord. Your New Archbishop is surely looking forward to your fraternity and your friendship. Continue to strive for holiness. You were made for greatness. We are all made for greatness. And your Bishop wants nothing more from you than sanctity. The Church needs Holy priests now more than ever. Let us commit ourselves to living the priesthood with joy.

Dear Consecrated men and women, you point us to heaven by your vocation. We thank God for your generous witness, and we invite you to do so in very close collaboration with your Chief Shepherd.

Dear lay faithful: your greatest vocation is holiness. God has given you the opportunity to become holy. Family life, professional life, your social and cultural and public lives are all venues for love and sacrifice. As one Archbishop Chaput said recently

**“The only thing that matters is to be a saint. That is what we need to be. That is what we need to become.”**

Your holiness can transform the world.

Brothers and Sisters: We are all united by our baptism into Christ's Church. Washed in that water, we share the dignity of baptism and a common vocation to holiness. The Church is not mine, the Church is not Cornelius Esua's, the Church is not Andrew Nkea. The Church is ours, our vocations depend on one another.

My dear people, we are theones who can make the responsibilities of Archbishop Nkea Andrew a little easier, a little lighter, by sharing in his call, so that his ministry can be a blessing from God.

And that is especially the responsibility of his closest co-workers, the priests of this Archdiocese to share the many pastoral responsibilities and needs in truly collaborative ministry with your Bishop, and care for him in truly human and personal ways.

To you Archbishop Cornelius, I want to thank you for your faithful and beautiful ministry as shepherd for all these past 14 years, as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Bamenda.

I guess from today the coat of Arms of Archbishop Cornelius Esua will or has been removed from the Cathedral from where he has taught the faith in Bamenda for 14 years.

Your word is Truth. We all know how during your Episcopal Ministry you lived up to that motto with passion. Your love for the Word of God has been outstanding.

Thank you, His Grace Cornelius Fontem Esua for being a faithful servant for Christ's people all these years. Thank you for your long unbroken years of service in Kumbo and Bamenda.

It is a challenging time to be Archbishop of Bamenda or a Bishop in this Ecclesiastical Province. We live in a time of deep uncertainty and insecurity as the traditional, religious and social foundations, we took for granted or what used to be commonly held as values have been seriously shaken or destroyed by the current socio-political crisis. There are many challenges facing us in these times.

Today we are reminded that it is the vocation of the Church to bring a living message of hope to the people at all times but more especially at this critical moment like the one we are going through now. The Church is the place where believers speak and listen to each other, and it is the community of faith that speaks with and listens to the world. The Church senses a responsibility for the world, not simply as yet another institutional presence or a benevolent NGO, but as a movement of salt, light and leaven for the world's transformation. In this way it must continue to exercise its prophetic mission.

We are a church that will never remain silent when human life is threatened. We cannot remain mute when gun violence continues to cast its deadly shadow over our villages and towns. How can the Church keep silent in the face of such tragic and deadly massacre like the one of innocent children, pregnant women and harmless civilians especially the recent one at Ngarbuh in Ndu subdivision? How can we in the face of such compelling testimonies and evidence be made to believe that such senseless killings are a lie?

**“I tell you, if we keep silent, the stones will cry out.”** Luke 19:40.

We cannot look the other way when our people are molested, intimidated, killed, rendered homeless, kidnapped and ransoms requested. The Church will always be friend and advocate of the vulnerable and the marginalized, always with a preferential option for the poor. We will be there for you. We will never forget you.

Oui, mes chers frères et soeurs, l'Église de Bamenda, accueille avec joie et confiance son nouvel archevêque. Il vient pour vous aimer. L'Église qui fait son pèlerinage sur la terre de Bamenda vit aujourd'hui l'expérience de la succession apostolique. Nous célébrons un dessein de Dieu. Dieu montre son amour pour ce peuple par la décision du Saint Père François de nommer Monseigneur Andrew Nkea comme Archevêque de Bamenda.

Aujourd'hui le ministère Épiscopale se présente devant nos yeux. Cher frères et soeurs, l'épiscopat n'est pas une classe sociale supérieure à laquelle sont attachés certains "privileges." C'est un ministère, un service et une lourde responsabilité. L'évêque à la responsabilité d'annoncer l'Évangile et de veiller sur le troupeau.

La joie! Oui tel est le sentiment qui habite aujourd'hui la Famille Chrétienne Catholique de Bamenda en ce grand jour où nous

accueillons en Église Monsigneur Andrew Nkea comme nouveau Pasteur de l'Église qui est ici à Bamenda.

Accuillez, avec foi et joie celui que Dieu à choisi pour nous, et qui vient au nom du Seigneur.

+ George Nkuo

Bishop of Kumbo.