

**Remarks by The Rt. Hon. Chevalier Dr. Joseph Uujamhan, KSG, PhD, FNSE, FAEng,  
at the Opening Ceremony of the 2022 National Eucharistic Congress holding at the  
Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre Benin City on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2022**

**Protocol:**

The President, Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev. Lucius Iwereju Ugorji,  
Your Graces, Your Lordships, Monsignori, Very Rev. & Rev. Fathers, Your Excellencies, The President Papal  
Knights & Dames, and other Knighthood bodies present, the Laity President, distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen

Who am I? Who am I to be invited to chair the opening ceremony of this great and uncommon gathering of the highest level of the clergy, religious and the laity bearing witness to the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, a unique and foremost doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, under the theme: *“For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”*. My first or indeed tamed response to this invite was to quiver, viewed against the background of my inferiority not only among the laity but more so before the clergy, to whom according to St. Francis of Assisi, I must first genuflect before even if angels were standing with them. Why must I not genuflect before these Bishops with their thirty-three (33) red buttons on their cassocks representing the thirty-three (33) years of our Lord, or the five buttons on their sleeves, representing the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ or the ten buttons put together, representing the ten commandments engraved on the two stone-tablets Moses angrily threw down at the foot of mount Sinai. Moses’ motive in breaking the tablets you may recall was in defence of Israel, to provide extenuation for their sin and to throw his lot in with theirs. That is what these Bishops and the hierarchy of the clergy do for us so to make me the Chairman of this extraordinary occasion is a faith journey in disguise and most memorable.

This function was thrown at me when I was just one-eyed, having gone for a surgery on my right eye I could be the king, I thought, if all others had no eyes but I am back by the Grace of God with my two eyes open and clear, and like the great singer would say, “I can see clearly now, the rain is gone”. I want to thank the organizers for this uncommon honour of chairing this occasion as we all look forward not only to a very successful outcome but also putting the conclusions into practice.

2. Let me also thank you for the choice of Benin City for this Conference at a time when this country is in an unusual political and economic upheaval. Christianity is the most dominant religion in this state. It was first introduced by the Portuguese missionaries during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. The Holy Aruosa Cathedral or Temple, the shine of the Supreme God, located at Akpakpava, commonly called the Church of the Oba was founded in 1517 by the Portuguese missionaries and Oba-Esigie, the son of Queen Idia. The Oba is recognized by his subjects as God’s representative on earth. The Aruosa Temple is a historical land mark on our Christian development in this community and beyond.

3. Today, we have grown far beyond but along with the Temple. All the Old Testament prophesies and injunctions point to one man. All the New Testament teachings and revelations point to one man who only lived for thirty three (33) years, as represented by the number of buttons on the Bishop’s cassocks. This gathering today of the clergy, religious, and laity is to witness to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. It shall heighten awareness among the faithful, of the centrality of the doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament in Catholic teaching and to encourage public devotion to the Eucharist as well as address and examine the *Synodal Church in her Communion, Participation and Mission*.

4. All agree, including some Protestants that the Eucharistic memorial ***“Do this in memory of me”*** as contained in the Gospels --- Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and the Epistle of Paul in 1Cor.11 recall, what Christ

was, what Christ said, and what Christ did and that participation in the Eucharist enhances and deepens the communion of believers with Christ and with one another. Although a Christian group called Quakerism sees the ritual as too formal and thus restricting the experience of the Holy Spirit and some others disagree on whether access to the Eucharist should be open to all Christians or restricted to members who have meant certain requirements, just as some others accuse Catholics of reading the Gospel texts in very literal sense, our Bishop Mike Elue would tell us at the Benin Provincial Eucharistic Congress, that we hold it in the Catholic Church as the main difference between us and other Christian faiths. The Catholic Church has no apology in recalling that our Lord was serious about eating his body and drinking his blood, for when his hearers walked away in protest against becoming cannibals, he did not call them back. He even asked his apostles if they would go away too. The genial and gracious Holy Spirit filled St. Peter, head of the Apostles, was quick to say “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (*John 6:68*).

5. Yes, for us Catholics, we believe in the “real presence of Christ in the Eucharist”. It is an effective commemoration of his death that also makes present the sacrifice on the cross. We believe that the elements of the consecrated bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, although the outward appearances of the elements, their accidents remain. St. Thomas Aquinas, the angelic Doctor of the Church, maintained that “a complete change occurs in the “substance” of each species, while the “accidents” or outward appearance remain the same. To him, this is the bread of angels. The angels eat Christ spiritually and do so in higher and more perfect way”. The whole Christ is truly present body, blood, soul and divinity under the appearance of bread and wine. Only in the Eucharist is he uniquely present. That Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again in glory contain the very essence of the Eucharistic mystery. It is the ritual consecration of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples. This is what the Priests are ordained for; to be the visible hands through which this miracle of miracles occurs, acting in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*). That is why coming to Benin City for this celebration is pouring grace on this soil and the country at large.

6. This is the faith many have shared their blood for. The Eucharist from the Greek word “*Eucharistia*” is thanksgiving of the highest order. Uncountable number of Saints have written much on the subject just as innumerable miracles have occurred to justify the Catholic position. Pope St. John Paul II in his encyclical “*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Most Holy Eucharist” published on April 17<sup>th</sup> 2003, begins with the sentence:

- The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.
- Frederick Ozanam of the St. Vincent de Paul fame says: The best way to economize time is to “lose” half an hour each day attending the Mass.
- The celebrated St. Teresa of Calcutta admonished thus: we should not separate our life from the Eucharist. The moment we do, something shatters.
- St. Faustina says: “The courage and strength that are in me are not of me, but of Him who lives in me, it is the Eucharist (Diary 91).
- For our Francis Cardinal Arinze: The Holy Eucharist unites Heaven and Earth.

May be we should rest the matter on the wings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council that “the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, for the Most Holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself our Passover and living bread.

7. The question arises as to how we should relate in our day to day living with the Eucharist. Has the Church given us models and guidance on the subject? It is indeed not a coincidence that the Year of Saint Joseph 2020 / 2021 was followed by *the year of the family*, which ended on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2022 at the occasion of the World Meeting of Families. The theme of that meeting (WMOF) was “*Family love, A vocation and path to Holiness*”.

The gathering reflected on the spirituality of the family in the light of the call to holiness as expressed in *Gaudate et Exsultate*. The Church reflected on the protector and defender of the family, St. Joseph. We may recall that when Pope Francis declared the Year of St. Joseph in 2020/2021, he charged the world with three things:-

- (i) To increase our love for St. Joseph
- (ii) To encourage us to implore his intercession
- (iii) To imitate his virtues and his zeal for Christ and the mother.

Pope Francis, like many Popes before him, effectively handed St. Joseph to us as one we should emulate in our thoughts and dealing with the Eucharist. Recall that Pope Pius XII told the world in 1955, *“If you wish to be close to Christ, we again today repeat, go to Joseph “Ite Ad Joseph”*. Where else can one be closest to Christ if not in the Eucharist? St. Peter Julian Eymard had this to say: “We have close to us as much as Joseph had at Nazareth; we have our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, but our poor eyes fail to see Him. Let us once become interior souls and we shall immediately see. In no better way can we enter into the Heart of our Lord than through St. Joseph. Jesus and Mary are eager to pay the debts which they owe him for his devoted care of them, and their greatest pleasure is to fulfill his heart desires. Let him, St. Joseph then lead you by hand into the interior sanctuary of Jesus, Eucharistic”.

**8.** Talking about adoring our Lord Jesus Christ at the tabernacle and at all times. Father Frederick Williams Faber as quoted by St. Eymard had this to say:

“St. Joseph worshiped Jesus as no saint before had done. From his deep, calm soul he poured out a very ocean of love, tenderest love, humblest love, love shrinking from being like the Father’s love, yet also daring to be like Mary’s had been, like the conjoined loves of Father and of Spirit, as she was Mother and Spouse conjoined. No angel might love Jesus as Joseph loved Him, as Joseph was bound to love him. No temporal love but Mary’s could be more like an eternal love than this love of Joseph for the Child because of its likeness to that of the everlasting Father. Aside from the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph was the first and most perfect adorer of our Lord”.

**9.** This learned saint, Peter Eymard gave us the genesis of how St. Joseph had been worshiping and adoring the Eucharist in these words:: “We cannot but marvel at the faith of St. Joseph. Tormenting doubts harass his soul and he is on the point of leaving Mary. But an angel appears to him and all his doubts and fears vanish. On the angel’s word He accepts the mystery of the Incarnation. In the ensuing years, his faith was to be frequently put to the test. At Bethlehem he had to content himself with a stable for a home where the Incarnate Word might be born. Soon after, he was forced to flee in order to save the Infant God, and when later he returned to the village of Nazareth, it was to live there unknown and in dire poverty. All these trials only tempered his faith. Although he sees only the Child’s wretchedness and poverty, his faith pierces the shroud and uncovers the hidden God within this weak baby frame. Because his faith was so strong, Joseph’s mind and heart bowed in perfect adoration. Imitate St. Joseph’s faith as you kneel before the humble Christ, annihilated in the Eucharist. Pierce the veil which covers this furnace of love and adore the hidden God. At the same time respect the veil of love and make the immolation of your mind and heart, your most beautiful homage of faith”.

**10.** Joseph the governor of Egypt stacked up corn to feed Egyptians at the time of great famine. Joseph, husband of Mary was the keeper of the Bread of life from heaven, with the desire that the children on earth consume the bread of everlasting life. To put it in proper perspective, St. Lawrence of Brindisi, the miracle working saint, who had memorized the entire Bible text in its original form and who wrote extensively and exhaustively on both Josephs, settled the comparison with these words:

“The former Joseph (of the OT) was holy, righteous, pious, chaste, but this Joseph, husband of Mary so far surpasses him in holiness and perfection, as the sun outshines the moon [Fr. Calloway p116 citing St. Lawrence of

Brindisi, Opera Omnia, feast day sermon]. So, it is that St. Joseph is the keeper of the Eucharist, the Bread of life from heaven. No wonder, he is the Protector and Patron of the universal Church, the Church of Christ.

11. Having shown the direct and easily reconcilable, indeed the gigantic roles of St. Joseph in the baking and preparation of the wheat that feeds us in the Eucharist daily and the continuous guard of today's Church and Eucharist at the tabernacle all over the world, in addition to having recourse to the link between the Year of St. Joseph and the Eucharist, I humbly request the hierarchy of the Church to give due consideration and effect to the following:

- (a) The Church in particular, the Church in Nigeria should make vigorous effort to strengthen *fatherhood*, taking as a model St. Joseph, the glory of domestic life, the caring father, the loving father, the listening father, a beloved father, a father in obedience, an accepting father, an exemplary father and a father in the shadows. We are invited to take him as our spiritual father, just as Mary is our spiritual mother, since we are not a *single* parent family. By strengthening fatherhood, we shall drastically reduce the crimes and waywardness that abound among our vastly neglected youths who eventually take to crime, which could make them not being in the state of grace to receive the Eucharist.
- (b) The Eucharistic Congress may recall and strengthen the long standing Tradition of celebrating the Votive Mass on Wednesdays, as promulgated by Pope Clement XI (1700 - 1721). It is a long standing Tradition of the Church that designated each day of the week (when not impeded by a feast) with particular theme to be recognized at the Holy sacrifice of the Mass. Many Priests do not follow this tradition these days, not out of ill will but because they are not aware that this tradition ever existed. On such Wednesdays, it will not be out of place to wear the chasuble with St. Joseph's image on it or one with lily. It may also be recalled that Pope Leo XIII approved the Wednesday recitation of the votive office of St. Joseph on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1883.
- (c) We thank God that the Statue of St. Joseph is now in the Church with the celebration of the Year of St. Joseph. He has come to stay with his spouse and wife as a family. We are not a single parent family. The classic defence of St. John Damascene (676 - 749) on Iconoclasm (images in the Church), that what words are to the blind is the same as what images are to the sighted still hold sway. The invisible things of God have been made visible.
- (d) There is the need to strengthen the subject of Mariology in our Seminary training by a firm introduction of *Josephology*, the study of St. Joseph. I have a draft syllabus which I know will undergo so many processes and panel beating before it can be what is acceptable. Many of us are ready to work with the Seminaries to achieve this. His nearness to the Eucharist entitles us to study him and imitate his virtues.
- (e) I thought I should just remind the Devotees of Divine Mercy of the words of St. Faustina, in Diary No.1203, to pray the, *our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory be and the Memorare to St. Joseph* everyday for protection. St. Joseph assisted her in the spread of Divine Mercy Prayers no.1244.

12. This Eucharistic Congress with the theme, "*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*" will enlighten us the Church militant, showing us the way to the Church triumphant after fulfilling the mission and mandate given to us. We are created for God and our restless hearts will wonder and drift in tidal waves until they rest in Him who created us. Let us celebrate this occasion for it will take ten years before we get another opportunity.

*Glory to Jesus, Honour to Mary and Joseph!!!*