

We Want To See Jesus (2014 Lenten Pastoral Letter)

Now there were some Greeks among those who had come to worship at the feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (Jn 12:20-23).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. Exactly eight months ago, on 4 July 2013, I was ordained your bishop. On that unforgettable day, as I walked into the premises of our Cathedral, I felt the warm, loving and joyous embrace of all of you in the immense crowds of people that had gathered to share in the joys and blessings of the Ordination and Installation ceremonies. Even the Cathedral itself looked like a mother with arms outspread in readiness for a maternal hug. And hug me it did! From that day, various implications of the short biblical verse I had chosen as the motto of my episcopal office began to unfold to me: "*Volumus Iesum videre*" - "**We want to see Jesus**" (Jn 12:21). As I explained elsewhere,¹ that motto was meant to express not only a prayer but also a project, a multi-directional project, for me and for the Family of God in Nsukka. Nevertheless, seeing the crowds on that day of my episcopal ordination and so many of you wearing dresses and T-shirts emblazoned with the phrase "**We Want to See Jesus,**" I was deeply moved and, there and then, I felt the need to reflect more deeply on its meaning for all of us in this Diocese. I have, therefore, chosen this propitious time of Lent to do such a deeper reflection and to address it to you in the form of my first Lenten Pastoral Letter. In doing this, I hope to remind all of us, early in my ministry as bishop, of what should be the goal of all our individual and collective pastoral activities, namely, an encounter with God's love in Jesus Christ.

The Church today invites all her children to engage with renewed interest and zeal in the new evangelization, in order to lead all to an encounter, or a renewed encounter, with Jesus.² In this Pastoral Letter, I wish to make the following invitation of Pope Francis mine: "*I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them.*"³ "**We want to see Jesus.**" I also wish to propose some measures that I believe could be useful to the people of this Diocese, religious and hungry for God as they are, as they seek to encounter Jesus.

Priority of the Encounter with Jesus

2. The Church has always played a leading role in human and structural development throughout the world. She has been a tremendous force for good throughout history and in every corner of the globe. Through her education of rural populations, formation of consciences, defence and promotion of life-sustaining values, provision of health and other services, construction of magnificent time-defying buildings (churches, schools, hospitals and other institutions), care and aid for the poor and the down-trodden, she has contributed, perhaps more than any other single institution in human history, to the integral development of human beings. Our own Diocese of Nsukka bears eloquent testimony to the role of the Church in human development. However, as important as this role may be, it ought always to be emphasized that the primary aim of the life and activity of the Church is the salvation of human beings through their encounter with and acceptance of God's love in Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Precisely in an area like ours, where there is

so much need for the goods and services which the Church readily and constantly provides, we have to resist the temptation of placing too much emphasis on such goods and services or, worse still, of treating them as ends in themselves. For just as was often the case when Jesus was on earth, so it also happens in our time that many may be favoured by the action of Christ and His Church without experiencing salvation.

3. In the same vein, it should be remembered that the proclamation of the gospel is aimed primarily not at a better moral life of human beings but at establishing a relationship, a relationship of love with the triune God who is love (*1Jn* 4:8). Although a radical moral transformation always follows every genuine encounter with God in Jesus Christ (Mary Magdalene, Paul, Augustine, etc.), to put morality first would be to reverse the order. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, "being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person [Jesus Christ], which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."⁴ Certainly, this encounter has the power to positively transform not just persons but societies and cultures as well. Indeed, the history of many important segments of the human family could rightly be regarded as a chronicle of Christ-inspired transformations. However, the recent experience of some parts of the world shows that once the transformation takes centre stage, it will not be long before the need for maintaining the encounter is forgotten and decadence immediately sets in.

The Natural Human Longing for God

4. There is in the heart of every human being a natural thirst for God, which nothing, except an encounter with Him, can ever totally extinguish.⁵ This thirst for God is felt by everybody, including those who claim not to believe in Him or those who have no name for Him. It manifests itself in many different ways. Sometimes its manifestation is very clear, like in religious acts. At other times it is vague and veiled, like in the soft voice of conscience or in the natural desire for excellence or even, paradoxically, in man's anger against God and in violent denials of His existence. Whether we are aware of it or not, the human hunger for God accompanies every action that is *truly* human. The Psalmist, therefore, speaks on behalf of all human beings when he says: "As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My being thirsts for God, the living God. When can I go and see the face of God?" (*Ps* 42:2-3). St Augustine also expresses the same truth when he exclaims: "You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised.... You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You."⁶

5. The reason for this natural and incessant longing for God by the human being is, as St Augustine suggests, that God created man for Himself and in His own image (*Gen* 1:27). There is in the human being not just the material or biological dimension but also the spiritual dimension. Just as the material or biological dimension of our being constantly longs for food, drink and other things needed to sustain it, so also the spiritual and divine dimension in humans constantly longs for God: "As the deer longs for streams of water...." One could also say: "As my body longs for food and drink, so my soul longs for you, O God." The spiritual dimension in human nature is, therefore, the *intrinsic* source or principle of the *natural* thirst for God. In this sense, the human being is said to be *naturally* a religious being,⁷ even when he does not profess any religious faith. This is similar to saying that the human being is a rational being, a being capable of the use of reason, even when he does not make good use of his reason. Since the natural longing for God is rooted in the spiritual dimension of our human nature, its expression is not automatic or instinctive. Biological drives in humans, such as hunger and thirst, are largely instinctive, while spiritual expressions, such as love, hate, work, play, smile, religion and many others, are dependent on human freedom. Hence, one may indeed deny God and his existence, just as one may, out of anger, claim he or she has no father. Such a denial, however, does not cancel one's natural longing for God. It only misdirects it.

6. Man's natural thirst for God is not in vain. God makes it possible for man to find Him. On the one hand, the human being naturally longs for God. On the other hand, God continuously

reveals Himself to man and, thus, gently beckons him to Himself. In fact, the initiative in any encounter between God and man always comes from God. God Himself is, therefore, the *extrinsic* source of man's thirst for Him, while the spiritual dimension in man is the *intrinsic* source. The natural human desire for God is but a disposition (thanks to the spiritual dimension), which makes man capable of responding to God's invitation. For God's revelation is indeed an invitation to man to enter into a relationship with Him. God reveals Himself in many different ways: from the beauty of creation (cf. *Wis* 13:1-9: *Rom* 1:19-21), through His action in human history and His Word revealed to the prophets, up to His perfect self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man. Describing God's revealing Word as a symphony that is expressed in many ways, Pope Benedict XVI writes: "While the Christ event is at the heart of divine revelation, we also need to realize that creation itself, the *liber naturae*, is an essential part of this symphony of many voices in which the one word is spoken. We also profess our faith that God has spoken his word in salvation history."⁸

All human beings in all epochs and cultures, therefore, have the possibility of slaking their thirst for God, at least partially. The many religious traditions in the world document the different experiences of human beings as they seek to satisfy their hunger and thirst for God. Addressing himself to a group of early Christians, the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* wrote: "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe" (*Heb* 1:1-2). Although not all peoples had the same direct revelation of God as the Jewish people had through the prophets, there is no people without some experience of God's manifestation. As Christians, we believe that God's self-revelation reached its perfection in Jesus Christ. We also believe that God spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament. That is why their writings are regarded as the Word of God. Nevertheless, besides this direct self-revelation, God also speaks to all human beings, in their hearts, through His creation and through events.

The Traditional Religiousness of Our People

7. It is generally accepted that the Igbo, like all African peoples, are very religious people. The human natural longing for God is clearly evident in many aspects of Igbo public and private life. Religion so permeates every aspect of life in the traditional Igbo society that there is no single word for religion in Igbo. The sense of the sacred is very deep and omnipresent in Igboland. Yet Igbo traditional religion does not claim to have prophets who received direct revelation from God. The most some people claim is receiving some form of communication from spirits other than God Himself. Nevertheless, God also "spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors." God speaks to all human beings, in their hearts, through His creation and through events. Our forefathers organized their religious life according to their experience of God in His various manifestations. Many natural phenomena were believed to be manifestations of God, while innumerable other spirits and the ancestors were seen as intermediaries between God and humans. Indeed the Igbo world was - and for many still is - so peopled with spirits that one sometimes has some difficulty in discerning the place and role of the one Supreme Being in that world.

8. The moral code inspired by Igbo traditional religion placed much emphasis on the sacredness of life, truth, justice, fairness, fellow feeling and the promotion of community spirit. Igbo traditional religious values and practice were generally aimed at the protection and promotion of human life, now and hereafter. However, given the "varieties of religious experience" (to borrow the expression of William James) and the egalitarian character of traditional Igbo societies, Igbo traditional religion was generally not centralized. Except for a few common festivals and when public order and the common good were at stake, families and individuals were generally left to choose their preferred form of worship and which spirits to sacrifice to. Furthermore, with a certain level of pragmatism, people were free to borrow from others, including strangers, the divinities to worship and could even discard those whom they considered ineffectual (*ikenga adighi ire, a waa ya nku*).⁹ For instance, many of the divinities worshipped in our area, Nsukka, were borrowed from the neighbouring peoples of

Igala and Idoma.

9. The arrival of the Christian missionaries introduced into Igboland a form of religion that was new in many ways. The missionaries claimed to be bearers of some Good News (*Ozioma*), a message that was *directly* revealed by God Himself in His Son Jesus Christ, the God who became man. Furthermore, they claimed that this message was directed to everybody and that it was indeed necessary for one to accept it in order to have life in abundance (*Jn 10:10*) and to be saved from eternal damnation. The people were therefore *invited* to discard their old religion and embrace the new one. The Christians made many other 'strange' claims besides. The initial response of the Igbo people was, understandably, hesitant and slow. Sometimes the Christian message was treated with scorn and contempt. At other times it encountered firm resistance and even violent rejection. But some people did accept the message. And slowly, but steadily, their number has been growing. Today, barely a hundred years since the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in the area now covered by Nsukka Diocese, the vast majority of the population has embraced Christianity. As the story of Jesus Christ continues to be told in our area, more and more people keep drawing closer to the 'storytellers' because of their desire to encounter Jesus: **"We want to see Jesus!"**

The Greeks at the Feast Wanted to See Jesus

10. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (*Jn 1:1&14*). The Incarnation is a central teaching of Christianity. The second Person of the Most Holy Trinity became man and lived among human beings. This happened in time and in a place. Jesus, true God and true man, was born among the Jews, a people who had been specially prepared by God for this event that was to change the course of human history for good. Because of the preparation for His coming through the preaching of the prophets, many Jews of Jesus' time were actually expecting Him. That notwithstanding, most of them did not recognize or accept Him when He came. "He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him" (*Jn 1:11*). The few who did, often treated Him like a private property - someone meant only for them and for their salvation, to the exclusion of all others. Once in a while, Jesus would gently correct this possessive and exclusivist attitude in His followers, sometimes indirectly (cf. *Mt 15:21-28; Mk 9:39-40; Lk 4:42-43*). In their defence, however, one may observe that some of Jesus' statements and body language seemed to have supported this attitude. When He sent out the Twelve on their mission He instructed them: "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (*Mt 10:5-6*). And in what one may regard as a deliberately provocative statement He said to His disciples: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (*Mt 15:24*). Nevertheless, after His resurrection, Jesus clearly commissioned His disciples to "go... and make disciples of all nations" (*Mt 28:19*), "go *into the whole world* and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (*Mk 16:15*) and to be His "witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth*" (*Acts 1:8*).

11. Although the disciples of Jesus realized the universal dimension of His ministry only after His resurrection, it already began to emerge during the last Passover feast that He celebrated on earth. On that occasion, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem in grand style. Many people who had come to Jerusalem for the feast flocked to Him, some carrying palm branches and shouting "Hosanna!" (*Mt 26:1-16; Jn 12:13*). The religious leaders of the people were upset by this and exclaimed: "Look, *the whole world* has gone after him" (*Jn 12:19*). Among those in the crowd were some Gentiles, Greeks. We do not know whether these Greeks had heard about Jesus before and had come to the feast hoping to run into Him. The gospel tells us that they had come to the festival for worship (*Jn 19:20*), although there is no indication that they were proselytes, that is, Gentile converts to Judaism. They may have been brought to Jerusalem by their natural thirst for God. On this occasion, however, this natural thirst was transformed into a burning desire for a personal encounter, a 'one-on-one' meeting with Jesus - to use a popular Nigerian expression.

12. Why were these Greeks looking for Jesus? We know that, in the gospels, people looked for Jesus for many different reasons. The Scribes and the Pharisees looked for Him in order to get Him into some trouble through difficult questions. The Elders and the Chief Priests were always looking for Him to kill Him. He often hid Himself from them. One Herod searched for Him and tried to kill Him as an infant (*Mt 2:1-20*); another Herod longed to see Him, perhaps out of curiosity (*Lk 23:8*). Zacchaeus wanted to see Him because he was looking for one who might understand him. The crowds looked for Him because they wanted some bread and more miracles. The sick looked for Him in search of healing and consolation. Parents looked for Him so that He might bless their children. Mary Magdalene looked for Him in search of forgiveness and out of love (both when she anointed His feet and when she went back to the tomb in the morning of the resurrection). His Mother Mary looked for Him out of motherly love and concern - with Joseph after the journey to Jerusalem (*Lk 2:41-50*); with some of His relations when they taught He was out of His mind, for He was preaching without eating (*Mk 3:20-21; 31-35*).

But why did these Greeks want to see Jesus? Perhaps they were seeking for wisdom. The Greeks were reputed for that: "The Jews demand signs and the Greeks look for wisdom" (*1Cor 1:22*). But if they had come to the feast for *worship*, then it is possible that in wanting to see Jesus, they were looking for something more than human wisdom. Perhaps they were concerned for Jesus' safety. It can be argued that Jesus' remarks when He was informed of their desire suggest that they came to warn Him about an immediate danger to His life and to advise Him to flee. It is possible, however, that these Greeks simply wanted an encounter with the Saviour. Jesus' reaction, in this case, would mean a kind of "**Now I can die!**" For in these Greeks He had seen all future Gentile peoples - including you and me - who would desire similar personal saving encounter with Him. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (*Jn 12:23*), for the Gentiles have now moved from their natural thirst for God to a longing for a personal encounter with God's love in Jesus Christ. Now is the prophecy of blessed Simeon fulfilled: these Greeks have at last seen in Jesus "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (*Lk 2:32*). Now the grain of wheat can die, so that it may produce much fruit (*Jn 12:24*). The soil is now prepared to receive it.

Like the Greeks, We too Want to See Jesus

13. The proclamation of the gospel to our people transformed the natural thirst for God in many to a burning desire to encounter Jesus. While the early missionaries spoke to our first Christian converts about Jesus, their hearts must have burned within them (cf. *Lk 24:32*). For some aspects of their traditional religion and philosophy must have disposed them for a positive acceptance of the gospel of Christ. As the Jewish people were prepared for God's revelation in Jesus by the teachings of the prophets, so, according to St Justin, the Greeks were prepared for it by the teachings of their philosophers. Justin Martyr saw Greek philosophy as containing the seeds of the truth of the gospel (*semina Verbi*). He even held that Plato got some of his ideas from Moses.¹⁰ Similarly, Clement of Alexandria quoted the Pythagorean philosopher Numenius of Apamea who wrote: "For what is Plato, but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?"¹¹ It can, therefore, be said that for Clement, too, God gave the Greeks philosophers just as He gave the Jews prophets, to prepare them for the message of Christ.¹² As I observed earlier, every people in every epoch has its own experience of God's manifestations. God also spoke to our ancestors in partial and various ways. The religion of our ancestors and their traditional philosophies also contained seeds of the Word of God. Many of their teachings about life, truth, justice, peace, brotherliness, "carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart."¹³ Whether or not one agrees with those scholars who claim that there are some striking similarities between the Igbo and the Israelites, especially in their religious and moral codes,¹⁴ one cannot deny that some aspects of Igbo traditional religion and culture also prepared our forefathers for the reception of the Christian message.

14. Although the historical, religious and cultural preparations of peoples may increase their disposition to accept the gospel of Christ, there is, however, no compulsion about it and the

acceptance is never collective. Response to Christ is always personal and free, whether among the Jewish people, among the Greeks or among the Igbo people. Freely and individually, therefore, we too have come to the feast, in large numbers. **We want to see Jesus.** But seeing may not be enough for us, for we are a very tactile people. We want to *touch* Jesus and be touched by Him. We want to *hug* Jesus! This is the need that I personally feel in my life as a human being, as a Christian and as a priest. It is the need I also perceive in many others with whom I interact daily. Sometimes we may feel too shy to admit this longing. At other times we may even try to camouflage it. But it never goes away. Let us, therefore, openly admit it, where necessary, even shout it: **"We want to see Jesus!"** Unlike our forefathers, who did not know that God had become man, we who now have this knowledge which has come to us through faith are blessed. "Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear" (*Mt 13:16*). We now have the possibility of a more intimate encounter with God in Jesus Christ.

Which Jesus Are You Looking for and Why?

15. Our ardent desire to see, touch and hug Jesus, good though it is, is not enough. In the first place, each of us has to ask himself or herself: "Which Jesus am I looking for?" As we approach Jesus He asks us, just as He asked His disciples: "But who do *you* say that I am?" (*Mt 16:15*). The answer each of us gives to this all-important question may depend on the experience he or she brings to the search. Who is Jesus for me? Who is Jesus for you? A great teacher? A prophet? A holy man? A miracle or wonder worker? A healer? Solution to all problems? *Agada ghachiri uzo? O loro ihe loro enyi? Igwe?...* Or is He simply "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," (*Mt 16:16*); "my Lord and my God"? (*Jn 20:28*). It is not easy for us as human beings to understand *perfectly* who Jesus is. His Mother Mary heard the things that the shepherds said about Him at His birth as well as what He said about Himself when they found Him in the temple in Jerusalem. She did not quite understand them but kept them in her heart (*Lk 2:19&50-51*). When Peter, the head of the Apostles, left himself open to the inspiration from God, he recognized Jesus as the Messiah, Son of the living God. But when he thought as any normal man would, Jesus saw him as an obstacle - Satan (*Mt 16:23*).

16. Closely related to the question of who Jesus is for us is why we look for Him. The gospels tell us of the embarrassing episode where the two brothers, James and John (with their mother, according to Matthew), approached Jesus to ask for positions of advantage among the other Apostles (*Mk 10:35-37; Mt 20:20-21*). It was a right move but for a wrong reason. A different scene is depicted during the call of the first disciples in the gospel of John, where the two disciples simply wanted to spend some time in private with Jesus: "Where are you staying?" they asked Him. "Come, and you will see." He replied. And they stayed with him for the rest of that day (*Jn 1:35-39*). This was a right move and for the right reason. In each case, as the people approached Jesus, he asked them what they wanted, in other words "why are you looking for me?" When we say: **"We want to see Jesus,"** He softly asks us: **"Why do you want to see me?"** Although He wants people to come to Him, He wants them to come for the right reasons. "Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (*Mt 11:28*). If we are looking for Jesus for the wrong reasons, chances are that we may not find Him and, even if we do, we shall not be able to stand Him. Those who came to arrest Him in the garden fell to the ground when they came face-to-face with Him (*Jn 18:3-6*).

17. Earlier, I noted that in the Igbo traditional religion, relationship with God and the other spirits or divinities is often pragmatic, that is, practical and businesslike. Some spirits or divinities are worshiped for the practical purpose of solving particular problems. This pragmatic attitude is also clearly noticeable in the attitude of some Christians today to Jesus. Many want to see Jesus only because they want Him to solve their problems and, possibly, make their life entirely without suffering. In a country like ours, plagued by economic and social hardships as well as by numerous moral evils, many, in the absence of functioning public institutions, see a miracle-working Jesus as the only way out. This has given rise to massive gatherings of Christian groups in this country that can rightly be described as 'miracle shopping malls.' It is not unusual to find Christians who even think that Jesus is under obligation to do what they

request of Him. If you ask Jesus to 'settle' you so that you may stop bothering Him, He may remind you that He owes you nothing. There is therefore the need for us to move beyond this pragmatic attitude to religion.

18. It must be pointed out, however, that this attitude is not limited to the Igbo people or to Nigerians alone. It was also found in the crowds that thronged the towns and villages Jesus visited. As we read in the gospel of John: "When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?' Jesus answered them and said, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you'" (Jn 6:24-27). Jesus invites us to come to Him. But He wants us to come for the right reasons.

19. Sometimes it is not even clear whether it is Jesus we are *really* looking for, or whether we are only running away from something else, particularly evil spirits. In many of our Christians, fear of the evil one is much stronger than the love of God. For such Christians, the beginning of wisdom is *not* the fear of the Lord (cf. *Prov* 9:10; *Ps* 111:10), but rather the fear of evil spirits! Such Christians invest more time and energy in 'casting and binding' evil spirits than in adoring God in Jesus Christ. Hence our Adoration grounds and chapels are filled with people who may not have come to *adore* the Eucharistic Jesus, but are *actually fleeing from evil spirits and evil men*. Priests operating in such centres, as ministers of the Word and Sacraments, have a moral and religious obligation to have pity on these people and *teach them* - the way Jesus always did (*Mt* 9:35-37; *Mk* 6:34). It would be self-deceptive to believe, as some do, that it is better for such Christians to be in the Adoration grounds for the wrong reasons than for them to go to the *dibias*. As long as nothing is done to correct the mentality, chances are that they will eventually end up at the *dibias*' shrines. It is one thing to come to *adore* Jesus, it is another thing to run to him only for protection. For time may come when some may feel they no longer need His protection, and they will leave Him and go their way - to self-destruction. This is now happening in some parts of the world. It would be presumptuous to think it will never happen in our land because of the deep religiousness of our people.

20. Take the case, for instance, of some children in the village who, being pursued by an *akatakpa* or an *oriokpa* or any other *ma*, run into an elder's house in search of refuge. They may be so engrossed by the presence of the *ma* - for as long as it remains there - that they do not even take notice of the elder sitting right at the centre of his *obu*. And as soon as the *ma* leaves, they are likely to file out of the elder's compound, just the way they came in. If the *ma* resumes its chase at any other point, or if it continues to harass the children right inside the elder's house, their destination is likely to be another elder's house. In the case just described, which is a common experience in our villages, would it be correct to say that those children *paid a visit* to the elder in whose house they took refuge? Not exactly. They were indeed in his house, but not to pay him a visit, even if at the end they greeted and thanked him. Although they may have been protected by the elder and were unharmed by the *ma*, they were not, however, enriched by the elder. They never *really encountered* him. The situation is certainly different when children, without any compulsion, decide to visit an elder - to pay him respect and homage, to listen to his words of wisdom, or to help him with some chores. Such children return home enriched. And, of course, no *akatakpa* or *oriokpa* would dare disturb them there. In the same way, when people run to Jesus because they believe they are being pursued by evil spirits and evil men, they may be protected by Jesus, but they may not *encounter* Him. But when we seek Him because, like the Magi, we want to pay Him homage (*Mt* 2:2), the encounter is very enriching, and the protection more comprehensive.

21. There are, therefore, many reasons for which we may want to see Jesus. But let the main reason be because we realize that He is *the way* to our true destiny as human beings. Jesus is the way to the Father: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (*Jn* 14:6). Our heart longs for God and can only find true satisfaction in

Him. Since Jesus is the only way to the Father, it then means that it is only through Him, with Him and in Him that our hearts can find true rest. "Come to me...", He says, "and I will give you rest." This should be the main reason why we want to see Jesus. Every other reason is subordinate to this one. Whether with regard to our search for daily meaning and fulfilment or with regard to our search for the ultimate meaning of our lives, a personal encounter with Jesus is what we need. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (*Jn 14:9*).

*Citizens of heaven
Children of the house of the Lord
We are going to the Father
In the Son, through the Spirit.*

So goes the refrain of a popular entrance hymn by the Spiritan Father, Lucien Deiss.

22. The encounter with God in Jesus Christ is in itself the greatest reward that a seeker of Jesus can ever receive. For it fills our life with meaning and joy. This truth is expressed by Pope Francis in a form of a question: "What other reward can God give to those who seek him, if not to let himself be found?"¹⁵ The answer is: "None." All the other blessings and favours we seek from God are contained in this encounter. For this reason, Christ enjoins us to first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and every other thing we desire and worry about will be given us (*Mt 6:33*). Let us seek to be part of God's plan for humanity, let us seek to be enveloped by His fatherly love revealed in Jesus Christ (*Jn 3:16*), and the protection, the healing, the fullness of life, we also rightly seek will be given us as well. An encounter with Jesus fills the human heart with joy.¹⁶

You Are not Searching Alone

23. Like in any other human search - the search for truth, the search for wealth, the search for happiness - in the search for Jesus, we are not alone. The human being is, by nature, a social being. Nobody can say "I" without a "You" and a "We." It is only in the company of other human beings that we recognize ourselves as human beings. **"We want to see Jesus."** Although the encounter with Jesus is always personal, the search for Him is better when undertaken in the company of other seekers. Many of the people we encounter daily are, in effect, also looking for Jesus and they would want us to help them find Him, although they may not explicitly say so (members of our families, our colleagues and friends, even those who may be hostile to us). They could also help us find Him. The realization that we are not in this search alone should embolden and encourage us. Let us take another example from the village experience. When children go out to fetch water, gather firewood, oil-bean seeds (*akpaka*), palm kernels, hunt for rodents or mushrooms... they usually go in groups. No wise mother would send her child alone into the bush on any of these missions. Only those wicked foster-mothers who exist only in folktales do such things. When working in groups, smatter children often help the slower ones, urging them on. Anybody who has ever been last on the line understands how useful such groups are. When in a group, the weaker one is not quickly noticed (*ayir' n'igwe, ne an'g' ama onye ike gwur'*).

24. "We want to see Jesus," as members of God's Family in Nsukka Diocese: bishop, priests, the religious and the lay faithful. *Ka-ka, onye ayale nwanne ye!* (please, may no one leave his or her brother or sister behind). In the morning of the resurrection, Peter and John were running together to the tomb. John, being younger, ran faster and got to the tomb first. But he could not enter. It was only when Peter arrived and entered that he too entered. It was only then that "he saw and believed" (*Jn 19:1-10*). In the evening of that same day, the disciples were together in one place and Jesus appeared to them. But Thomas was not there. We do not know why. But he did not experience the risen Lord until a week later. This time Thomas was with the rest and Jesus returned to allow him to have the experience as well (*Jn 20:19-29*). Very often our attention is so focused on the doubt of Thomas that we forget that he missed the first experience because he was not with the rest. This is not to suggest that one searching alone will not find Jesus. Jesus permits whoever searches with a sincere heart to

find and to encounter Him, as was the case with Mary Magdalene. But when she encountered the risen Lord, He sent her immediately to share the experience with the others (*Jn* 20:11-18).

25. Our culture too needs to encounter Jesus. Every culture needs the same transformation that the encounter with Christ brings about in human beings. The redemption that comes from Christ is needed by and meant for not only humanity in general but also the entire creation and all human cultures. "For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (*Rom* 8:19-21). We believe that God created the whole universe and that God found everything He created very good (*Gen* 1). Because of the sins of human beings, however, the goodness of creation was contaminated: "Cursed be the ground because of you! ... Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you" (*Gen* 3:17-18). St Paul in the above passage from his *Letter to the Romans* is reassuring us that just as human fall damaged the beauty of the entire created order, so human redemption will lead to the restoration of the beauty of creation. An encounter with Christ redeems man and, through him, redeems creation.

26. If creation, which is God's handiwork is disfigured by man's sins, how much more will culture, which is man's creation, bear the negative signs of human sinfulness. As proud as we may be of our culture, and rightly so, let it always be borne in mind that culture is a cumulative product of human activity. A culture cannot be more perfect than the human beings who produced it. An encounter with Christ will bring forth the best in our culture, making it blossom from within and rendering some of its values universal values. In this way, our culture will itself become an instrument for the expression of the Christian message. The following exhortation of Benedict XVI concerning Africa in general is equally valid when applied to our culture. "By accepting Jesus, Africa can receive incomparably effective and deep healing. Echoing the Apostle Peter in the *Acts of the Apostles* (3:6), I repeat: what Africa needs most is neither gold nor silver; she wants to stand up, like the man at the pool of Bethzatha; she wants to have confidence in herself and in her dignity as a people loved by her God. It is this encounter with Jesus which the Church must offer to bruised and wounded hearts yearning for reconciliation and peace, and thirsting for justice. We must provide and proclaim the word of Christ which heals, sets free and reconciles."¹⁷

Philip and Andrew Led the Greeks to Jesus

27. Since our search for Jesus is done in the company of other seekers, we should let ourselves be enriched by the experience of others. It often happens that people are led by others to encounter Christ. These Greek seekers could have gone to Jesus directly, as the Greek (Syrophoenician) woman whose daughter was sick did (*Mk* 7:26; *Mt* 15:22). We can speculate about why they rather chose to approach Him through the mediation of Philip. Perhaps it was because he and Andrew had Greek names and the Greeks imagined that they would be more sympathetic to their cause. Perhaps they realized how delicate or difficult the situation was and thought it better to seek help from somebody more familiar with Jesus. But that their choice was a wise one is shown by the fact that Philip did not think it wise to present their request alone to Jesus, but to seek the support of Andrew. Why give up on a good quest just because you think that alone you may not succeed? Have you sought the help of others around you? Remember, you are not searching alone. We ought to learn from these Greek seekers how to humbly ask for help when we need it to encounter Jesus. *And often we need it!* We ought also to learn from Philip. He felt he could not handle the matter alone and asked the help of Andrew, "then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus" (*Jn* 12:22). Jesus always sent out his disciples in twos (*Lk* 10:1), certainly not without reason. There are many Philips and Andrews around who can lead you to Jesus. You only need to have the *wisdom* to discern them and the *humility* to ask them to help you. And if you are Philip, find your Andrew! You do not need to do it alone.

28. Furthermore, these two Apostles are models to all Christians in many ways. Andrew was one of the first two to be called by Jesus, in the gospel of John. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist and when John indicated Jesus to them as the Lamb of God, Andrew and his companion left John and followed Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus that afternoon was so enriching that Andrew sought out his brother Peter, told him about Jesus and brought him to Him (*Jn 1:35-42*). If we think of the fact that Peter eventually became the head of the Apostles, we can appreciate more fully the importance of the instrumentality of Andrew in the vocation and mission of Peter. In the same way, Philip was called by Jesus the following day. Philip found Nathaniel and told him immediately about Jesus. Nathaniel was sceptical about Jesus of Nazareth being the Messiah. And Philip urged him on: "Come and see." He went and he saw, not simply "the one about whom Moses wrote in the law," as Philip had told him, but *the Son of God!* (*Jn 1:43-51*). Without the mediation of Philip, the life story of Nathaniel would probably have been different. The actions of these Apostles actually teach us that anyone who *truly* encounters Jesus has an irresistible urge to lead others to Him. The Samaritan woman who encountered Him at the well (*Jn 4:7-42*) is another eloquent example. So was St Paul.

29. None of us can assess fully the role that his parents, teachers, preachers, relations, friends, colleagues and other fellow wayfarers have played in his or her relationship with Jesus. Similarly, we may not know what role we are playing in the relationship of other persons with Jesus. As I noted earlier, many of those with whom you interact daily are looking for Jesus. You may be the only Philip or Andrew who can take them to encounter Him, even when they may not be asking you explicitly to do this for them. You may also be leading people to see Jesus or, unfortunately, preventing them from seeing Him, without realizing it. To be able to lead people to Jesus we must be ready to follow him ourselves. This entails sacrifice, for the grain of wheat must die to bear fruit (*Jn 12:24*). "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (*Mt 16:24*).

It ought also to be noted that even when people are led to Jesus by their experience of creation (like the Magi who were led by a star) or by events in their lives (like Paul), at some point they also need help from other human beings. The Magi sought the help of Herod (the wrong person) and he had to consult those who could search and interpret the Word of God in the Scriptures, the chief priests and the scribes (*Mt 2:1-8*). Paul got his revelation directly from Jesus Christ (*Gal 1:11-12*), but he was helped by Ananias to understand the meaning of his first encounter with Jesus, was baptized by Ananias and was always assisted by other believers like Barnabas. Furthermore, his later encounter with the other Apostles reinforced him in his mission (*Gal 2:1-10*). Every Christian can and *should* lead others to encounter Jesus by being the best of who he is and serving God in what he does, thus letting the image of God in him, which has been redeemed by Christ, shine out in its splendour. If Jesus who is the light of the world (*Jn 8:12*) has made all of us light of the world as well (*Mt 5:14*), thus making us share in His being and mission, He expects us to lead others to the Father through Him. "Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (*Mt 5:16*). People usually "follow the light to new knowledge and discovery" (*The Breviary*). Encounter with Jesus is a life-long affair and needs to be renewed daily. We need one another to make this possible.

Where may We Find Jesus and How?

30. "Seek the Lord while he may be found" (*Is 55:6*). "But where," you may ask, "can I find Him?" Let it be said immediately that since it is God who freely lets Himself be found by those who seek Him, there is no limit to the places and occasions where one may find Him. Nevertheless, as children of the Church, we can be helped by the faith of the Church and the shared experiences of our believing Community over the years. It has already been pointed out that God reveals Himself in many varied ways. But the primary place for encountering God is in His Word, especially in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate and perfect revelation of God.¹⁸ God's Word is transmitted to us in the Scriptures and in the Apostolic Tradition of the Church. The Apostles and disciples of Jesus handed on to successive generations of Christians what they received from the Lord through their inspired writings in

the New Testament and their preaching, celebrations and their lives (*1Cor 11:23-34; 1Jn 1:1-4*). "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, committed to the Church."¹⁹ For all Christians, therefore, the Bible remains a privileged place for a personal encounter with God. A daily prayerful reading of the Bible offers us an opportunity to encounter God in Jesus Christ. The Word through whom God created the universe (*Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2*) became words in the Sacred Scriptures before becoming flesh and dwelling among us (*Jn 1:14*). Hence the Church always exhorts her children to read the Scriptures frequently and devoutly in order for them to have proper knowledge of Christ. For, as St Jerome tells us, "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."²⁰ It is a welcome development that more and more Catholics in our Diocese now own and *read* the Bible frequently. This may be attributed to the influence (a good one) of the new religious movements on our faithful. Those who have not yet formed this beautiful and enriching habit, should lose no further time in doing so.

31. While reading the Bible, however, the believer must never lose sight of the fact that it is not just a work of literature, but a product of a believing Community. It is, therefore, within the context of the faith and life of this Community that the Bible can be correctly read and its message fully appreciated. "Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will" (*2Pet 1:20*). Hence, the Word of God in the Bible assumes a more profound meaning when it is read by and in the worshiping Community of believers. Jesus Himself said: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (*Mt 18:20*). We therefore encounter Jesus in the Word of God proclaimed and explained in liturgical celebrations. In this regard, Benedict XVI affirms: "The liturgy is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives; he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond. Every liturgical action is by its very nature steeped in sacred Scripture."²¹

32. Priests, as ministers of the Word, therefore, should always be aware of the importance and the delicateness of the responsibility they bear in proclaiming and expounding the Word of God during the Mass and other liturgical celebrations.²² The homily is an important part of the liturgical action. "The homily," says Pope Francis, "can actually be an intense and happy experience of the Spirit, a consoling encounter with God's word, a constant source of renewal and growth."²³ Some Churches have kept the ancient practice of engraving the verse, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" on the pulpit, as a reminder to the preacher that the people expect him to offer them Jesus, not his pet ideas, during the homily. It therefore amounts to a grave act of irresponsibility should a priest fail to at least *attempt* to lead the faithful to Jesus through his homilies. To be able to do this, however, the priest must himself first seek to encounter Jesus through prayer and meditation over the sacred text to be proclaimed in the liturgy. The priest's encounter with the Lord will radiate on his face when he speaks to the people, as was the case with Moses (cf. *Ex 34:27-35*). Those of us who bear this grave responsibility should take to heart the following admonition of St Paul to Timothy: "Proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths...perform the work of an evangelist; fulfil your ministry" (*1Tim 4:2-5*). We should preach the Word, in season and out of season, welcome or unwelcome.... Yes. But preachers and ministers of God's Word should *never* yield to the ever present temptation of using the pulpit as a place to settle scores with or vent their anger on some members of the congregation. People in that congregation look up to us expectantly with an unspoken request: **"Father, we wish to see Jesus."**

33. The Bible can also be read as a form of prayer or it can motivate the believer to pray. Prayer seems to be the most spontaneous and direct way by which any believer connects with his or her God. Prayer is like a personal and intimate conversation with God. Jesus invites us to enter the inner room of our being, shut the world out, and there converse with our God in the intimacy of our hearts (*Mt 6:6*). This is indeed a simple but very important means of encounter with God in Jesus. Do you want to encounter Jesus? Fall on your knees and search

for Him in your heart. And you will find Him right there at the door of your heart, knocking (Rev 3:20). "Christian prayer," says the *Catechism*, "is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of God and man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man."²⁴ As Christians, we pray through Christ, with Him, and with one another. In Baptism, we are united with Christ and incorporated into His Body, the Church. Therefore, the best form of prayer is the one said as members of this Body. Private prayer is good. Community prayer is best! In this age of social networking, many people, especially younger persons, realize the need for remaining connected with other persons. In fact, the popularity enjoyed by social network today may rightly be regarded as a symptom of the loneliness many suffer in our mass culture. Yet, those who use social network applications (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Tango, LinkedIn, Google+, MySpace, etc.) know that to remain connected and escape from loneliness, one has to get involved. Otherwise, the flood of information can just pass one by and the feeling of loneliness not only persists but may even get worse. Similarly, in the community prayer of the Body of Christ, it is not enough just to be there. One has also to get involved and add his or her voice to the chorus of voices rising to the Father through Christ. Unlike the anonymous mass in social network, however, every single voice in the community prayer of the Church is unique and is recognized by Christ the Head of the Church.

34. In the celebration of the Sacraments, the Church combines the reading of the Bible with community and private prayer. Hence, Christians can also encounter Jesus whenever they celebrate the Sacraments devoutly. The two disciples of Jesus on the way to Emmaus in the evening of the day of the resurrection, met a 'stranger' along the way and their hearts burned within them as this 'stranger' explained the Scriptures to them. But they *recognized and encountered the Risen Lord at the breaking of the bread* (Lk 24:13-35). The Sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ as means of His abiding presence in the Church, through the action of the Holy Spirit. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministries of his Church... Sacraments are 'powers that come forth' from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are 'the masterworks of God' in the new and everlasting covenant."²⁵

35. The Eucharist, "source and summit of Christian life,"²⁶ and Penance are two Sacraments in which Christians can daily renew their encounter with God's love in Jesus Christ. The Holy Eucharist, the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, instituted by Our Lord and entrusted to the Church "to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until He should come again,"²⁷ is the greatest gift God gave to human beings as a means of direct personal encounter with Him. Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist devoutly and receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we enter into a real and intimate communion with God in Christ. We have Jesus' word on it: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:56). Similarly, when we approach the throne of God's mercies in the sacrament of Penance, we have a liberating encounter with Jesus as we hear Him say to us: "Your sins are forgiven... go in peace" (Lk 7:48&50). When we go to confession, we take a position like that of Peter after denying Jesus, so that when the merciful Lord turns and looks at us, our eyes may meet His (Lk 22:61). This encounter has a healing and restoring effect. It heals us of the self-inflicted wounds of our sins and restores in us the true image of God disfigured by sin. May I exhort all Christians, especially during this sacred season of Lent, to rediscover the hidden treasures in this Sacrament. I equally make a passionate appeal to all priests to please make themselves available for its celebration. Furthermore, with Pope Francis, "I want to remind priests that *the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best.*"²⁸

36. Jesus also offers us another virtually unlimited space and occasion to encounter Him in our brothers and sisters. "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). Love shown to our brothers and sisters, especially those in need, offers us a direct line for an encounter with God's love in Jesus. In a society like ours, where there is so much need, privation and suffering, and where many tricksters and

fraudsters are ever ready to exploit the charitable person, it may sometimes be difficult to know when to help and when not to. Some people who are not sick or hindered in any way seem to have rather chosen begging as their 'profession,' spinning all kinds of lies with which they emotionally blackmail the kind-hearted. We are, therefore, sometimes assailed by doubts about whether to help or not. Nevertheless, it is always better to make a mistake by helping someone who may not be in need of help than by failing, because of our doubts, to help someone who actually needs it. Poverty has dehumanized many people in our society. Christ's face has been disfigured in many by the sins of greed, corruption and apathy. Although these faces, like that of the suffering Jesus, have lost their original beauty, whoever, like Veronica, lifts his or her hand to restore some beauty to these faces, will have the image of Christ imprinted in his or her heart.

37. All those persons (public office holders, politicians, entrepreneurs, religious speculators, etc.) whose actions or inactions have created the dehumanizing poverty in our society should not think that mere charitable hand-outs can lead them to encounter Jesus in the poor. Like short Zacchaeus (*Lk 19:1-10*), they have to find a 'tree' to climb, because of their spiritual and moral dwarfism, so that they may see Jesus in the crowds of human beings they trample underfoot like worms. They need a change of attitude towards these least of the Lord's brothers and sisters and treat them as their brothers and sisters as well. Only then will the Lord recognize them as children of Abraham (*Lk 19:9*).

38. There are also many other places and occasions in which we can encounter God's love in Jesus: in the self-giving love of couples to each other, in the loving obedience of children to their parents and care for them (especially when they get older), in the expression of the beauty of creation through art and music, in the defence and promotion of the rights of the oppressed, in the concern and care for the created order... The few that I have briefly reflected on above are only meant to show us how near Jesus is to all who seek Him with a sincere heart and how possible it is for all to find Him.

Conclusion

39. "We want to see Jesus." This desire is felt by every Christian, although it may be felt in different degrees by different persons. In some, it is so ardent that it becomes a conscious daily longing. In others, it is so faint that it is hardly noticeable, because it has been suffocated by other 'junk desires.' The desire to see Jesus is also felt by non-Christians, since every human being naturally longs for God and Jesus is the way that leads to God. The consoling thing is that Jesus also wants to see us. That is why He came into the world. As we seek to encounter Him, He also seeks to encounter us. In fact, our desire to encounter Him is made possible by Him. As the Church prays in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer: "For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you" (*The Roman Missal*). The Lord has placed in our hearts and within the Church the means of finding Him. Very often we fail to encounter Him, either because we do not seek Him or because we seek Him in the wrong places or for wrong reasons.

40. As we begin the journey of renewal in this sacred season of Lent, may we return to the warm embrace of the Mother Church, so that together **WE** may seek the Lord where and while He may be found, following the time-tested pathways that were used by our Mother Mary, the Apostles and the saints. These looked for Him in the past and found Him. We shall also find Him, if we seek with sincere hearts and follow the right paths. In the rough sea of our lives, the boat of Peter and the Church guided by Our Lady, Star of the Sea and help of Christians, will surely bring us face-to-face with Jesus. An encounter with Him will renew our missionary and pastoral zeal, keep evil spirits, thoughts and actions away from us, transform and purify our culture and make us agents of positive change in our society. For He makes all things new (cf. *Rev 21:5*). Above all, *an encounter with Him will fill our hearts with joy!*

+ Godfrey Igwebuike Onah

Given in Nsukka, St Theresa's Cathedral
Ash Wednesday, 5 March 2014.

Footnotes:

- ¹ See the Ordination and Installation Brochure, p. 11.
- ² Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013).
- ³ FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 3.
- ⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 1.
- ⁵ Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27.
- ⁶ ST AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, I,1,1.
- ⁷ Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 44.
- ⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (13 September 2010), 7.
- ⁹ J. Obi OGUEJIOFOR, *The Influence of Igbo Traditional Religion on the Socio-political Character of the Igbo*, Fulda Publishing Company, Nsukka 1996, pp. 76ff.
- ¹⁰ ST JUSTIN, *I Apologia*, XLIV, XLV, LX.
- ¹¹ ST CLEMENT, *Stomata*, I, XXII.
- ¹² See JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 38; Benedetto XVI, *Catechesi sui Padri della Chiesa: Da Clemente Romano a Gregorio Magno*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2008, pp. 31f.
- ¹³ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 53.
- ¹⁴ See, for instance, G. T. BASDEN, *Niger Ibos*, Frank Cass & Co, London 1966, pp. 411-423.
- ¹⁵ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013), 35.
- ¹⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1.
- ¹⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* (19 November 2011) 149.
- ¹⁸ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965), 2.
- ¹⁹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, *Dei Verbum*, 10.
- ²⁰ ST JEROME, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Prol.: PL 24,17. ²¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 52.
- ²² Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 46; BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 59.
- ²³ FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 135.
- ²⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2564.
- ²⁵ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1115-1116.
- ²⁶ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), 11.
- ²⁷ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1323.
- ²⁸ FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 44.