



CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA

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To: All Catholic Priests in Nigeria

ON ABUSES DURING LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

1. The sacred liturgy is the heart of our worship and the summit of our Christian life. It is an act of divine worship that belongs to the entire Church and must be safeguarded with the utmost reverence and fidelity. However, it is with deep concern and righteous indignation that we observe an alarming increase in aberrations during worship across our nation, perpetrated by some of our own priests. These abuses include deviations from the prescribed prayers and rubrics of the Mass, including the Eucharistic Prayer; irreverent handling of the Eucharist; walking down the aisle while carrying the monstrance during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and blessing the people using gestures akin to sprinkling of Holy Water; inappropriate music including the importation of secular ones into the liturgy; indecorous dance, even with the monstrance containing the Eucharist; commercialisation of the liturgy in form of taking up too many collections and fundraising right in the middle of liturgical celebrations; use of the pulpit to pursue personal interests; incorporation of local customs that are inconsistent with the faith under the umbrella of inculturation; failure to use proper vestments; lack of adequate preparation for every aspect of the liturgical celebration; the invention of rites, such as Child Dedication with some priests placing the child on the altar, when, in the teaching of the Church, a child is dedicated to God during baptism; blessing of items not approved by the Church as sacramentals; and many others. These grave violations are not only a direct affront to the sanctity of the liturgy but also a source of scandal and embarrassment to the Church in Nigeria.
2. Let it be unequivocally stated: The liturgy is not a private playground for personal innovation. It is not a platform for the self-expression of the celebrant. It is a sacred trust, handed down by the Church, which must be celebrated according to the established norms and traditions. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council is clear: "Regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church." (SC, 22). Any priest who takes it upon himself to deviate from these norms is guilty of a serious betrayal of his sacred duty and is leading the faithful astray.
3. We condemn, in the strongest possible terms, any and all abuses within the sacred liturgy. Such actions are not merely errors in judgment; they are violations of the sacred order and must be treated as such. We remind our priests that the altar is not a stage for theatrics, nor is the liturgy a venue for novelty. The Church has given us clear directives on how the liturgy is to be celebrated, and these must be followed without exception. Fidelity to the laws of the Church is not optional—it is mandatory. The faithful deserve nothing less than the true and reverent celebration of the mysteries of our faith.
4. To our bishops, the chief liturgists of their dioceses, we issue a solemn charge: Take immediate and decisive action to correct these abuses. The faithful look to you for leadership, and it is your sacred duty to ensure that the liturgy in your diocese is conducted with the dignity and reverence it demands. As affirmed in the universal laws of the Church, "Within the limits of his competence, it belongs to the diocesan Bishops to lay down in the Church entrusted to his care, liturgical

regulations which are binding on all.” (Canon 838 §4). Where necessary, penal measures must be employed to bring offending priests to account, making them realise the gravity of their actions and deterring others from committing similar offenses. Diocesan directors of liturgy and vicars forane (deans) are to collaborate closely with their bishops in this sacred task. It is imperative that they work together to ensure that priests within their jurisdictions adhere strictly to the directives of the Church. This collaborative effort is essential in maintaining the unity and sanctity of our liturgical worship.

5. To our priests, we say this: You are entrusted with the most sacred responsibility of celebrating the mysteries of our faith. This is not a responsibility to be taken lightly, nor is it one that allows for personal interpretation. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council reminds us that “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.” (SC, 14). This can only be achieved when the liturgy is celebrated with the decorum, reverence, and fidelity that it demands. Abuses and deviations from the prescribed form are not only unacceptable but are a grave disservice to the faithful and to the Church.
6. In conclusion, let us all renew our commitment to the proper and faithful celebration of the liturgy. The liturgy is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, a sacred encounter with the divine, and must always be conducted with the utmost solemnity and reverence. Any actions that diminish this sacred encounter are to be condemned and corrected with the seriousness they deserve. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the priests who, in their celebration of the liturgy, remain faithful to the teachings and traditions of the Church. Your commitment to reverence, decorum, and fidelity upholds the sanctity of our worship and serves as a shining example to all. May our liturgical celebrations always reflect the beauty, order, and sanctity that they are meant to convey, leading the faithful closer to the mystery of Christ; and may our Lady, assumed into heaven, intercede for us that we may be faithful to the teachings of her Son and of the Church. Amen.

Given this Fifteenth Day of August in the Year of our Lord, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four, on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

+Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji

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Archbishop of Owerri
President, CBCN

+Donatus Aihmiosion Ogun, OSA

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+Augustine Ndubueze Echema

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