



2025 New Year Message of His Eminence Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke to the Faithful
in the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia and Men and Women of Good Will

**“IN HIS DAYS, JUSTICE SHALL FLOURISH AND PEACE TILL THE MOON
FAILS” Ps 72:7)**

**“N’oge ya eziumume ga-achawaputa, udo ga-adikwa ruo na njedebe
uwa” (Ps 72: 7).**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Happy New Year!

It is another year! We are all stepping into a new cycle and setting out on a journey of discovery, hope and grace. May God’s ever watchful eyes be on each of us and may His blessings abide with us, now and always! Amen.

Amazingly, this is a special year! A year unlike others. A Jubilee Year! We get an echo of the meaning and implication of this Year in the description of the Week of Peace in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. In this special week, the people of Umoḡfia abstained from all forms of violence, including verbal violence. This, ordinarily, would have been deemed impossible. But in this special week, it was the norm. The Week was usually marked by peace, forgiveness and friendliness.

Similarly, the Jubilee Year, which in the Scriptures is celebrated on the 50th year, resets all relationships – spiritual, socio-economic and ecological. As we do with our cell phones when we reset and not just reboot them, the Jubilee Year restores all relationships to the primordial factory setting. It is meant to restore God’s justice in all aspects of life; to wipe the slate clean. As a year of forgiveness and rebirthing, it makes possible a new beginning with God, with the land, with oneself and with one another (Lev 25).

Jesus: the Messianic King

As Christians, we mark the Jubilee Year as people of the New Covenant. We acknowledge Jesus Christ as the messianic king foretold by the Scriptures, in whose days, as the Psalmist foretold, “justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails” - “*N’oge ya eziumume ga-achawaputa, udo ga-adikwa ruo na njedebe uwa*” (Ps 72:7). Because the moon was understood as un failing, peace is supposed to be everlasting. What a glorious vision of the messianic time. We are, therefore, doubly obliged to hallow this year and contribute to works of justice and peace in our various capacities, in honour of the Jubilee Year and in consonance with the messianic time inaugurated by our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, just as the Week of Peace described by Chinua Achebe presents an improbable possibility, so we

are challenged to work for the realization of justice and peace, however improbable success at this may seem.

Justice and Peace as Counterfactuals

Although the Psalmist had announced that in the days of the messianic king, justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails - “*udo ga-adikwa ruo na njedebe ụwa*” (Ps 72:7), the reality on the ground is the opposite. There is widespread injustice, oppression and conflict. There are wars in some parts of the world. In most communities and families, however, there is no war. There is no peace either. More worrisome are the selection, projection and popularization of some guiding ideas that foster anxiety and detract from justice and peace. Often life is presented as essentially a competitive rather than a cooperative venture in which selfish opportunism is the rule. In our Igbo context, we have such sayings as *agwo enoghi ibe ya o naghị ebu*, which justifies the “dog-eat-dog” mentality; *a na-enwe obodo enwe*, which justifies the rule of the powerful rather than rule of law and justice; *onye ube ruuru o rachaa*, which commends opportunism rather than principled action. In line with these ideas, relationships, even within families, have turned into battles of wits or silent wars – *agha uche* – as people scheme to take or avoid being taken advantage of. Added to these issues that arise from people’s relationships, there are the external challenges of a predatory State and its agencies whose mode of operation often sabotages justice and peace, weaponizes poverty, and condones insecurity to life and property. These fuel helplessness and hopelessness. It is in this context that we are called, like in the Week of Peace in the Igbo traditional set up, to do the improbable of living out the ideals of justice, peace and being positive change agents. In a sense, this is a call to martyrdom. To commit to the path of truth and social justice in the Nigerian context is sometimes to be the odd man or woman out. It is to invite opposition. It demands swimming against the current. To withstand the pressure demands deep faith and hope in God and in the goodness that lies within each person, even in the worst of us.

Pilgrims of Hope

The context described above makes the theme of the 2025 Jubilee Year, “Pilgrims of Hope” very pertinent. *Ndi Igbo* are resilient people and seem to have hope written in their gene. This is certainly an exaggeration, but it captures the fact that there is an element in the culture that helps *ndi Igbo* to persevere in all circumstances because *o buru na mmiri emejighi ubochi, chi ka di; n’onodu niile, olileanya di; onye kwe, chi ya ekwe; o tee aka o di njo, o di mma*. These imply a deep appreciation of the contingency of history; nothing is permanent. One single and seemingly insignificant event can create a domino effect to upturn the situation from gloom and doom to cheer and charm. One must only hang in there, keep working and waiting it out. *O ka na ndu makana onye dikata ndu, o zute ihe oma; onye di ndu, nwere olileanya*. No room for despair! Hope is the currency. But Christian hope goes beyond the above. It has a different grounding, and it impels to action to make life better for all in line with God’s plan of justice, peace and forgiveness.

Christian hope is not based on the openness of history but on the certainty that the Lord of history has decisively intervened in history and made human beings adopted sons and daughters of God, partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:3-4) and those destined for eternal life with God. Eternal life is not life in the future; life after death. Rather, it is life with God in the **NOW** which comes through intimacy with God (1 Jn 5:11-12). In the Gospel we read: “eternal life is this: to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent” (Jn 17:3). “To know” here means more than intellectual knowledge. It implies intimate communion (Gen 4:1). Faith is thus the door through which we walk into this life of intimacy with God. It is the door to eternal life. It is when we have attained this eternal life that we can say with St. John: “he that is in us is greater than he that is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4) and with St. Paul, “can anything cut us off from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:35). Nothing indeed, because placed side by side with the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus, everything fades in significance (Phil 3:8).

The Jubilee Year is an invitation to deepen and enjoy the divine life God has graciously inducted us into. It is also a call to intensify our discipleship of Jesus, who went about doing good (Acts 10:38); a call to strive not to model our behaviour or be conformed to the world but to be transformed through renewal of our minds so that we may discern in all circumstances what is God’s will and what is good for all people (Rom 12:2). This entails standing up with love against evil in ourselves and in others, and committing to the propagation of God’s kingdom where justice shall flourish and peace flow like a river. We can only do this as pilgrims of hope, forgiving each other and transforming the conflicts in our families – nuclear and extended; supporting each other in whatever way possible in the tough socio-economic situation we find ourselves in Nigeria; striving to dismantle the structures of sin that have conspired to get our society to where we are today so that we can bequeath a brighter future to our children.

May we live this year and all the days of our lives as pilgrims of hope, a hope that never disappoints (Rom 5:5). Happy New Year!

✠ Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke
Bishop of Ekwulobia