

“FOR US AND FOR OUR SALVATION”

Homily of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke, at St. Eugene Catholic Church Los Angeles, with the Igbo Catholic Community on Trinity Sunday, May 31, 2026

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Preamble

It is with joy that I greet you again in the name of God the Father, in the name of God the Son, in the name of God the Holy Spirit – Holy Trinity, one God. Today, the Church wants us to pause and to reflect on what comes to our mind when we say God. The Church wants us to more consciously make the sign of the cross – in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and to pray with greater devotion “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!”

I can imagine that back home in Igboland, many choirs had this song among the selection for today’s liturgy. If you know it, sing along with me.

“O bu ife omimi nke ka uche mmadu, ato n’ime otu Chineke di ngozi. Anyi ga-ekwe ya maka Chukwu kuziri ya! Ato n’ime otu Chineke di ngozi! Kelee ya, Ngozi diri....Kelee...Ngozi diri, Keleeee..... Ngozi diri ato n’otu di Ngozi!” (twice).

For those who do not know the song and do not understand Igbo, the story about St. Augustine portrays the same thing – the impossibility of wrapping one’s head around the mystery of God as three persons in one God. St. Augustine is said to be walking on the beach, pondering the mystery of the Trinity. He then saw a boy going back and forth with a teacup, scooping water from the ocean and pouring it into a hole he had made. When asked by St. Augustine, the boy replied that he wanted to empty the ocean into the hole. “Of course, this is impossible,” St. Augustine told him. The boy is said to have replied: “so is your effort to comprehend the Trinity.” The boy then disappeared. In the story, God is like the ocean and the effort to understand the Trinity is like emptying the mystery of God in all its immensity into the tiny human head. This is a futile venture which the Igbo articulate by saying *na Chukwu bu ama ama, amacha amacha*.

Today, I want us to take a different approach. Let us ask a different question: not how can we comprehend the Trinity, but why did God reveal this divine mystery? Surely, it is not to frustrate or expose the limitations of human thinking. I invite you to reflect on the fact that God revealed the mystery for our sake and for our salvation. This is the title I gave to this reflection: “For our sake and for our salvation,” – *maka ihi anyị na maka ihi nzoputa anyị* - which is a line from the Creed. But before then, something I learned about your community provides a background that will help us to appreciate more deeply this mystery of God’s being. This requires a confession on my part.

2. A Confession and God’s Providential Act

Let me confess that when I learned that we would have this Eucharistic celebration with your community and the planned reception thereafter, I had mixed feelings. This is because it seemed to move away from the purpose of my trip. I am in the United States on a Pastoral Visit to the priests and lay faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia. This entails visiting them in their places of apostolate, interacting with the bishops they work with and with the communities where they exercise pastoral ministry. Where possible, I meet the lay faithful from my diocese and their friends. I will have a meeting with all the priests of my Diocese in New York. My message to all is simple. And it is: REMAIN FAITHFUL, be the Priest, the father, the mother, the young person you are! Be a good son or daughter of CADEK – the acronym for Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia. This entails being interested in and involved in the affairs of their local communities at home. Everything is not money. I invite them to contribute ideas, care and concern in the light of that Igbo vision of mutuality *na ndị nọ n’ụnọ, nọrọ ndị n’ezi, ndị nọ n’ezi nọrọ ndị nọ n’ụnọ*.

Of course, both your Chaplain, Rev. Fr. Jude Umeobi, who I learned will leave you soon, and Sir Anthony Ikebudu are from my diocese. I have met several others from CADEK. But that is actually the root of my initial reluctance with the arrangement. There are 57 dioceses in Nigeria. Some dioceses would have one or two persons here. If their bishop comes and the community does not invest as much energy in the preparation of his reception as was done when the bishop of a diocese with many more members of your community visited, such a visit

would create bad blood in some places. Unnecessary problems should be forestalled. This was the root of my initial reluctance. I had to come nonetheless because it had been arranged. But when I arrived, I was reassured that my visit would not be a source of any misunderstanding, that you have clear policies on this matter and that your arrangement was to honour God's unmerited favour of creating me a Cardinal. Above all, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity being celebrated today, challenges us to invest in our communities – beginning from the most immediate and intimate – our families without neglecting the bigger community. I will explore this challenge in greater detail soon. Let us go back to the question asked above: why did God reveal the divine mystery?

3. “For Us and for our Salvation”

Trinity Sunday is celebrated after Pentecost Sunday and the Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after Easter Sunday. What is at the foundation of these celebrations is God's love and compassion. Note, it is not that God showed love and compassion, rather, God is love and compassion. God created the world out of love. Human beings are in the image and likeness of God. This means that human beings are not only sharers in God's love. They are also made for love. Human beings have both an innate need and an innate capacity for love. Love is the only thing that does not hurt. Love binds many into one - *ihunaanya na-ekeko ndi mmadu ka ukwu aziza*. We often sing: “**Ebe ihunaanya na obioma di, ebe ahụ ka Chukwu nọ!**” Where there is love, the framework of understanding and action is no longer the interest of the individual, rather it is that of those in the circle of love. Where there is love, the language is about *anyi anyi* - or “we we”. Whatever one does, one does for the benefit of the group. This is done without grudges or any expectation of repayment (*ihe anyi na-emere onwe anyi*). Where there is indifference however, it is about “*mu na ya*” or “*mu na ha*” or “*anyi na ha*” (*onye obuna na-aza aha nna ya*). Where there is no love, the language is about “I”, “me” and “myself” – selfishness – which may want to exploit or dominate others for one's own gain. As you can see, there is much love in the world, as well as much indifference and above all, so much lack of love. Yet, this was not the divine intention. What thwarted the divine intention? The answer is simple: SIN.

It is unfortunate that, in our day, sin is trivialized. Some people have erased it from their vocabulary. Others have reduced sin to specific acts without paying attention to its root – the refusal to submit to God’s loving ordinance. At the root of sin is disobedience – refusal to listen to God and to see God’s loving design in creation – and a decision to secure oneself. This is the story of Adam and Eve. With the primal disobedience, everything changed. Other people became a problem to be solved through domination or exploitation. Cain killed Abel. Even today, violence has multiplied, starting from domestic violence in homes and exploitation by those who profess to love each other.

To save humanity, God sent His Son. Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped. He trusted God and obeyed even unto death on the cross. Therefore, God exalted him and gave him a name which is above every other name (Phil. 2:5-11). In this way, Jesus showed us that the way to life and to human flourishing is by submitting to the Father and seeking the fulfillment of what we pray in the Lord’s Prayer that God’s will be done on earth as in heaven. It is God’s will that we love one another as Jesus has loved us – that is, to love others to the point of giving our lives for them, as Jesus did.

At Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and formally inaugurated the Church – the community of those who have experienced God’s love in Jesus Christ and have come to believe and to commit themselves to spreading this message of surrender to God and love of all people.

Last Sunday, we celebrated Pentecost. Today, the Church presents to us the Trinity. God carried out the events of our salvation – the incarnation, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. **From these events in salvation history, we can deduce that God is a Trinity of persons. The Father sent the Son, who was conceived in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit on the community of believers to empower them to spread the Good News of salvation throughout the world. In the history of our salvation, God revealed the inner life of God – that God is three persons, with perfect unity, equal dignity and shared divine nature. Love is what binds. Love makes many**

different things one. Love makes possible unity in difference. Because God is love, the three persons **is** one. I know that it may sound strange to say “three persons is one.” That signals that human language breaks down before the mystery of God.

We can now in hindsight gain a deeper understanding of who we are as human beings made in the image and likeness of God, who is Trinity. It shows that all human beings shared a common humanity – unity in difference is possible. We are one but must work hard with tender care to sustain this unity in love, trusting and obeying God. This is the challenge of growing in holiness.

4. Holiness as Growing in Love and Building Community

It is interesting that after the birth of the Church on Pentecost, the Trinity is placed before the newly inaugurated community. This means that **the task given to the Church born on Pentecost is to seek the unity of all humanity in line with the vision of the Trinity, in whose image and likeness, human beings were made. This is the task entrusted to every baptised Christian, to every domestic Church, every parish community, every diocesan family. My presence among you today is to remind all of us of this task which must be done at different levels.** It must be done first at a personal level. All of us must seek integration and integrity at the personal level. Some of us are at war with themselves. We carry past hurts, resentments, guilt, confusion, etc. **Today, we are invited to seek harmony and reconciliation of the different dimensions of our lives. This is possible. Let go of the hurts and resentment.** Come back to God, who is tenderness and compassion. Accept divine love and forgiveness. Forgive yourself, forgive others and accept that you are deeply loved by God.

The work at the personal level will immediately take one to the family and significant others in one’s life. We are made in the image of the Trinity. We should feel a sense of belonging in our families – accepting and supporting each other in love while challenging each other to become the best versions of who God made us to be. This means that if there are people who have estranged themselves from their families, seek ways to reconnect or facilitate the reconnection of others.

Seek to foster peace and love in your parish community. This requires negotiating the different personal identities and histories. It is not always easy. Variety and difference can be sources of strength rather than conflict. But those involved must commit themselves to personal transformation and ongoing conversion to conform more to the image of the Trinity in which we are made. As I speak of your parish community, I remind you that you have a dual domicile. Identify with the town and parish community of your place of origin. Many of you are already doing this well. I am raising it so that you do not get tired and to encourage those who have not been doing so or those who have been disenchanted with the way things go back home not to be disheartened. News from home can be discouraging. Things seem to get from bad to worse by the day. Some of you might have been milked dry by even your own relatives, who see you as an ATM (Automated Teller Machine). Cynicism may seem a better option. What I am telling you is that the Trinity challenges us to keep working towards building up community. God has his purpose for making you *onye Igbo* and by extension, *onye Naija* or wherever you come from. In the same way, show that you belong to your various dioceses of origin. As already said, financial contribution is not the only way of showing this. Your ideas are very welcome. Above all, we are all invited to continue to grow in holiness and love for one another through commitment to community building in line with God's vision for creation.

5. Gratitude

Let me end on a note of gratitude to Archbishop José Gomez, who received me warmly, to Rev. Fr. Jude Umeobi, your outgoing pastor, and to all the officials of your parish who held several meetings to prepare for this visit. I thank all of you from far and near for your presence. Remember, we are made in the image of the Trinity – three persons united in perfect love. May we strive to live in love of God, love of self, and love of our neighbor.

Peace be with you!