"SHINE YOUR EYES!"

Homily of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke on the 32nd Sunday, Year A, at St. Paul Church, Highland, Illinois

1. Preamble

I thank God for the gift of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, for the grace of being a Catholic, belonging to a family constituted of peoples of every nationality, tribe and tongue. This made it possible for me to be here enjoying the privilege of sharing with you the Eucharist. I thank Bishop Thomas J. Paprocki. He permitted this Off Cycle Missionary Cooperation Program so that I can share with you the vision behind our project of taking care of vulnerable adults and children in my diocese and to ask for your support. I also thank Fr. Pat Jakel, your pastor, who has been so supportive of our mission.

2. God speaks through Nature and the Scriptures

In my part of the world, trees are green all year round. But here, In Fall, the trees are aflame with colours. I have enjoyed feasting my eyes on the shades of colours on the trees from my room at the Bishop's residence in Springfield and while driving around. Some of the trees have lost their leaves and stand tall, as if dead, but ready to weather the snowstorms and the cold of winter. The leaves, while beautiful, announce their imminent death. In hope, new life will flourish again in Spring. Through these natural processes, God teaches us about the inevitability of the end to life – death – and the hope of a new life in Jesus. The readings today recommend wisdom as a virtue we must strive to cultivate.

3. Shine Your Eyes

There is a fascinating expression in Nigerian English, (I guess you know that there is a Nigerian English!). Shine your Eyes! This is a way of asking someone to be wise. It is the imagery that the expression evokes which makes it interesting. Shining the eyes, goes beyond asking someone to be vigilant or to have one's eyes open. It challenges one to polish one's eye – metaphorically – so that nothing escapes one's consideration; nothing is left out in one's planning; attention is given to every important element for a balanced judgement and well informed decision. So, when you are told in Nigeria to shine your eyes, you are

challenged to be alert and smart, to be watchful and discerning, to avoid distractions and carelessness and to weigh every factor carefully and to come to a balanced judgement. That is wisdom.

4. **"In his Riches, man lacks wisdom" Ps 49:20**

A line in the Psalms sums up the human predicament and the need to shine our eyes. According to the Psalmist, "in his riches, man lacks wisdom" (Ps 49:20). Today, there is an abundance of information, material well being, global inter-connectivity and other technological breakthroughs. Yet the many conflicts in our world, families and hearts, point to a lack of wisdom and misalignment of values. Society pressures us through advertisements and other means to focus on values and activities that drive the economy and our earthly life. This is the source of the misalignment. God is reminding us through the voice of nature that in as much as earthly life is important, it should be lived in view of life with God, which ought to start in this life. Wisdom means thirsting for God like dry land thirsts for water and allowing this longing for intimate relationship with God to shape our decisions and actions. This is what it means to have oil on our lamps.

5. **Topping up the Oil in the Lamp**

I am here to ask for your financial support for a project in my diocese, the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia, Nigeria. This diocese was created in 2020. We have a lot to do to set things up. But we decided to focus first on vulnerable adults and children – to give them a home. Let me tell you one of the stories behind this project. There was this woman I met when I was a newly ordained priest. She was very active in the parish. She was leading the women and did a lot for the children. She did all these as a volunteer. Her family was middle-class. After my stay in the parish, I left and she also relocated. We lost contact. Recently, someone called me on phone and extended the lady's greetings. I was happy to hear from her and promised to visit her. When I did, I received the shock of my life. It was raining when I arrived. I stepped into her house and saw water dripping on many spots. The roof leaked badly. According to her, when it rained, she would coil herself in her mat in a small corner to avoid getting soaked. She then narrated her tale of woes. She had lost her husband. Much later, her only daughter, who was the breadwinner for the family, died and left two granddaughters in their

teens. These are unemployed and have no assured source of income. Friends and neighbours tried their best to help. With time, such help dwindled. People had their own problems. Her situation progressively got worse – she was in her 90s, sick, frail, malnourished and unsure of the next meal. I still remember her lament: “why has God left me to go through this?” I could relate to her lament knowing her socio-economic condition when I first met her and the deplorable condition I found her in.

This is one of my many experiences. My priests have their stories too. These experiences became the origin of our commitment as a diocese to take care of vulnerable adults and children, to honour the image of God in them and show them love. Back home, one’s children are one’s social security and insurance. Therefore, the death of a breadwinner plunges the dependents, especially parents and grandparents, into poverty. Ours is a rural area. The young migrate to the cities, leaving the elderly behind in the village. Even those whose children could provide for, do not find it easy because there are no trained caregivers.

In response to this, we set up, as a Diocese, a pilot project: a home where vulnerable adults and children are cared for as one large family. The idea is to provide the senior citizens the energy of the young and the young with the stability and wisdom of the elderly and to encourage inter-generational bonding. The facility has 30 rooms. As we speak, there are 42 residents sharing the 30 rooms, with many on the waiting list. We have 19 children. Some are orphans, others are abandoned, and the rest have parents incapable of taking care of them. There are 17 staff members. Nuns manage the facility, and a priest takes care of the spiritual and the sacramental needs of the residents. This service is not restricted to Catholics. It is open to all. It runs partly on charity. Families that have the means, pay. Those who cannot afford to pay for their loved one, or those who have no one to care for them, are taken in on charity. Because of the need for this service, we decided to expand the facility. We have started construction. The present stage of construction, as of September 14, 2026, is seen in the video clip that Fr. Pat graciously put out on your parish Facebook page.

6. Conclusion

I was reliably informed that your parish is very active in missionary outreach. I thank Fr. Pat and all the pastors and parishioners who have helped to foster this vision of the Church as one family in which members from various nationalities, languages and cultures, share their gifts and talents. Today, we are reminded to shine our eyes, to be wise and to live our days on earth anchored in God, who is eternal. When we do this, sharing with the vulnerable and the needy, becomes a spirituality rather than humanitarian assistance or philanthropy. It becomes a way of topping up the oil in our lamps as we wait for the appearance of the Lord.