



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS

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Special Circular

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To all Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Archdiocese of Lagos.

Dear Msgri., /Frs., Brothers and Sisters,

CONCERNING THE "DAY OF PRAYER PROCESSION" SCHEDULED FOR ASH WEDNESDAY, 26TH FEBRUARY 2020.

1. Our attention has been drawn to the message being circulated across various social media platforms concerning the Prayer procession scheduled for Ash Wednesday, 26th February, 2020; as a mark of solidarity with the many kidnapped and murdered victims in the wake of the current security challenges that we are facing in the country.
2. After prayers and due reflection on the circumstances of Ash Wednesday, we hereby direct that the Ash Wednesday liturgy as arranged by the various Parishes should be maintained.
3. However, the faithful are enjoined to dress in black or at the least wear black arm bands as a sign of mourning and solidarity with the victims of kidnapping and other violent crimes that betray the high level of insecurity in the land
4. The Statement of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria shall be read at all Masses on Ash Wednesday. Please find below the Statement.
5. We shall participate in the National prayer procession that will come up later, on a date to be announced.
6. Finally, let us continue to keep up prayers for our beloved country Nigeria that God will have mercy on us and save us from this evil that is ravaging our people.

Signed,

+ Alfred Adewale MARTINS

Archbishop, Metropolitan See of Lagos

STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA ON INSECURITY IN THE COUNTRY

"In Ramah is heard the sound of moaning, of bitter weeping! Rachel mourns her children; she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more."
(Jeremiah 31: 15)

Today is Ash Wednesday. On this day, Christians all over the world begin a spiritual journey of repentance marked by prayer, penance, alms giving and other forms of charitable works. We do this in order to participate more intimately in the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, in preparation for the celebration of the solemn feast of his Resurrection at Easter.

As we begin the holy Season, we, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, invite all Catholics in Nigeria as well as other Christians and persons of good will to unite in prayer and penance for peace and security in our country. The level of insecurity in Nigeria today is such that whether at home or on the road, most Nigerians, in all the parts of the country, live in fear. The repeated barbaric executions of Christians by the Boko Haram insurgents and the incessant cases of kidnapping for ransom linked to the same group and other terrorists have traumatised many citizens. That the perpetrators of these heinous crimes make public shows of them on social media and Nigerians do not hear of any arrests or prosecution of the criminals raises very serious questions about the ability and willingness of the government to protect the lives of the ordinary Nigerians. To make matters worse, many communities are constantly threatened, harassed and sometimes even sacked by herdsmen, as they seek to forcefully take over more territories for the purpose of grazing their cattle.

Aware of our moral responsibility, may we, once again, remind all the arms of Government in Nigeria and all whose responsibility it is to protect Nigerians that without security there can be no peace and without peace that can be no development or national growth. We therefore appeal to the Government to immediately put a stop to this unprecedented wave of violence and brutality aimed particularly at Christians. We also call for the arrest and prosecution of all those behind these senseless killings that sow the dangerous seeds of hate and distrust among the various segments of the Nigerian society.

We are sad. We are in sorrow and grief. But we are confident that the light of Christ, which shines in our hearts, will brighten the dark corners of our Nigerian society. As a mark of mourning for all our brothers and sisters who have been victims of the most recent wave of violence against Christians, we are all dressed in black today and offer our prayers and penance for their repose. We invite the universal Church and all Christians to join us in prayers for our dead brothers and sisters and for peace and security in Nigeria. We equally appeal to the international community to come to the aid of the Nigerian government in the fight against these daredevil terrorists, who want to destabilize our country. The consequences, should they succeed, will be grave not only for the West African sub-region but also for Africa as a whole.

To all our faithful we make a passionate appeal: The present situation in Nigeria challenges all of us to a life of coherent witnessing to the Gospel. The impact of our Christian faith must be felt in public life. This is not a time for compromises for the sake of personal convenience, but rather for heroism in Christian virtues. Remember the words of our Lord: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" (Matthew 10: 28) Furthermore, foreseeing a period like this in the life of his disciples, our Lord said: "You will be hated by all because of my name, but no hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives" (Luke 21: 19). Before long, it will be Easter and the Lord will show that he has triumphed over evil, darkness and death. Be of good courage!

Our Lady Queen of Nigeria and Queen of Peace, pray for us.

Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze

(President CBCN)

Most Rev. Camillus Umoh

(Secretary CBCN)