

# Addressing issues of Reconciliation Justice and Peace in the Church and in the world

*Msgr Obiora Ike*

*Presented at the First Nsukka Catholic Diocesan Synod:*

***“One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism”***

*(Ephesians 4:5)*

*Date: 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2010*

## Gratitude and Reckoning:

It is a great honour and privilege to be invited to address the entire faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, a diocese that is home to many of us. I share and bring sentiments of joy, prayers and well wishes of the people of God in Enugu during this momentous occasion of the celebration (within 20 years of its erection), of the First Synod of Nsukka Diocese under the broad theme: ***“One Lord, One faith, One Baptism”*** (Ephesians 4:5). With Nsukka and its Church and people, we are one. I have come to share my reflections in all humility, taking the language of the Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI expressed in *Caritas in Veritate* to address you on issues bothering on ***reconciliation, justice and peace***. I shall specifically apply these to the concrete realities and the daily excruciating experiences of the people of God in the ecclesiastical circumscription of Nsukka Diocese, often torn between hope and hopelessness, faith and doubt, ambitions and challenges, wishes and reality, vision and despair, abandonment and encouragement. Like St Paul, we are invited in the Spirit to become: ***“One Body called to Peace, in Christ”*** (Colossians 3:15).

My fraternal respects and gratitude goes to the principal organisers of the Synod under His Lordship, Most reverend Francis Okobo, Bishop of Nsukka who, together with the clergy, religious and lay faithful have continued to give credible witness to the faith we all have received and continue to nurture in these parts since 1910. This date from the available records circulated in the *“Instrumentum Laboris”* and the *“Lineamenta”* prepared by the Nsukka Diocesan Synod Committee marks the historical beginning of evangelisation in the northern parts of the Igbo nation including the territory of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu, mother of Nsukka Diocese where we have our historical ancestry starting from the Eke Mission with the arrival of the first missionaries on our shores.

Their coming was heralded and promoted by a man who refused to be baptised as a Christian since he was strongly anchored in the faith and essence of his ancestors in traditional religion, yet accepted and respected the human qualities and developmental potentials which Christianity brought with it, thus acknowledging the Christian value and message of Christ for a people torn between the past, present and future. Paramount Chief Onyeama of Eke through a mysterious wise clinging to Christian education brought by the European Catholic missionaries opened a new gateway for his sons, daughters and people, thus leaving posterity to inherit Catholicism, modernity, humanity, health services and development potentials as veritable tools linked with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Igbo land. He becomes therefore a pioneer and paradox for evangelisation, although a “*pagan*”, who ushers in a new missionary era, the Catholic brand, a remote but truly historical background to the Synod event which we celebrate these days here in the diocese of Nsukka.

We may add that this courage, daring, confrontation and prominent role of the paramount Chief, Onyeama of Eke and many other notable personalities from the Agbaja and Nsukka areas of northern Igbo land in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gives us the foundation and the realisation upon which we can make our expression in the *One faith, One Lord, One baptism* under the Spirit, by the mystery of the incarnation, the “*Word made Flesh who dwelt among us*” (John 1: 14). Since history cannot be divided into watertight compartments, one event follows another in a continuity of past-present-future. Our gratitude must go out to these uncountable predecessors as we recall their memory with respect and adulation. They, the European and indigenous missionaries handed over to us what they had themselves received in the universality of the one faith founded on Peter the Rock by the Master Jesus Christ himself, truly human and truly Godlike in a faith shared within a Church that the catechism tells us is “*One, Holy, Apostolic and Catholic*”.

Thus today, the Good news of Christ has found its way into our hearts and souls, huts and village squares, families and homes, feasts and artefacts, works and religion, economy and thought patterns, philosophy, symbols, language and cultural idiosyncrasies. This news characterises our ambitions and aspirations and has become our actual destiny. This Good News was made possible because of the co-operation of human elements including many great ancestors, catechists, local chiefs, teachers, missionary religious men and women, great people, many of whom have gone before us, “*marked with the sign of faith*” (St John, Book of Revelations).

Those great men from the western hemisphere mainly from Germany, France, Ireland and other European nations, all early missionaries celebrated the word of God on our soil, broke bread in the Eucharist and gave us the education and civilisation, health services and human developmental qualities upon which we

as a people, an indigenous, African, republican Igbo tribe today sing the Te Deum and the Exultet in our native tongue. We have by His Grace become the “*primus inter pares*” and the largest provider of missionary vocations amongst the many tribes and peoples within Africa and the universal Church, becoming by His Grace, the first in position, quantity and quality when compared with any of our peers within the entire continent of Africa made up of 54 countries. The Igbo Church with Nsukka at its northern boundaries has an added advantage to contribute their talents and gifts to a world that is hungry and thirsty for the Word of God and eager to receive the reconciliation of all of creation in Christ, “*through Him, with Him and in Him*” (Doxology at the Liturgy of the Holy mass after Consecration).

Nsukka Diocesans, like many others have joined this emerging global village, even when things seemed to fall apart with the gradual intrusion of new values linked to nationalisation, westernisation and modernisation challenging traditional values and cultures and in some ways purifying and complementing the natural faith of our ancestors with a new faith and lifestyle and newness that could only be said to be complete in Christ, the perfect human being. May the Holy Spirit of God enrich and lead us all to a deeper awareness of the mysteries we cherish and the fruits of this *Syn hodos* (walking and working together) for God’s greater glory and honour Amen.

The Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa was convoked in the Vatican by Pope Benedict XVI and took place from 4<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2009. The theme chosen was “The Church in Africa in service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: You are the salt of the earth.. You are the light of the world” (Mathew 5:13-14). The Synod followed upon the first Synod which held in year 2004 on the theme of Evangelisation wherein it identified 5 thematic areas for the practice of evangelisation, namely: proclamation, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace and the means of social communications. The fruit of that Synod has not been adequately digested by the Church in Africa.

Permit me to x-ray these issues, my Lord Bishop, brother priests, dear brothers and sisters gathered at this Synod and to provoke your thoughts to critique our fear, lethargy and lack of courage on issues of reconciliation, justice and peace within our Church today, our country Nigeria, the African continent and the world at large. Our submission is that Faith in the resurrected Lord, who died and suffered, liberates and only in this liberation that has truth and charity as ingredients would justice and peace be found. This is the foundation for a true reconciliation that is both sustainable and Christocentric. “*You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free*” (John 10).

Reconciliation in God gives believers, including those in Nsukka diocese access to power of the Holy Spirit so they can be reconciled to others. The work of reconciliation goes beyond relations among persons and peoples and extends itself to all creation (cf. Romans 8:19). In fact, through Jesus Christ, God the Father has reconciled all things to himself, the things of heaven and the things of earth (cf. Col 1:20). If the Church is to fulfil well the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to her by the Lord Jesus, she herself must become more and more a reconciled community, a place where reconciliation is proclaimed to all people of good will.

*“For thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness”* (Mathew 3:15). Jesus Christ, in insisting that he be baptised by St John the Baptist, wished to do what was just before the Father, thus fulfilling his will. Because of this, he received heaven’s approval. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and the Father acknowledged his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased (cf. Mt 3:16- 17). Obedience to God’s will flows from justice toward one’s neighbour, a fact also indicated among other things, in the Decalogue (cf. Exodus 20: 2 –17). The rights of God come before and serve as the basis for the rights of individuals and peoples. Jesus Christ himself promised that God will readily give justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night (cf. Luke 18: 6-8).

Seen among the vast numbers of the elect are the infirm, the poor, the enslaved, widows, migrants and persons in the periphery of society. These are the very recipients of God’s preferential love, so much so that the Lord identifies himself with them: “as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mathew 25:40). In particular, Jesus Christ declares blessed those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (cf. Mathew5:10). He himself is the example par excellence of God’s righteous and gentle servant who justifies many (cf. Mt 12: 18 – 21; Isaiah 40: 1-4; and 53:11). Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the justice of Christians goes beyond that of the Pharisees (cf. Mt 21:32) and becomes mercy (cf. Mt 9: 13; 13:7). Even penitent sinners, who believe in God and do his will as did the publicans and prostitutes, have a place in the Kingdom of justice and peace (cf. Mt: 21:32). Retributive justice must be integrated with reparative justice, in Nsukka diocese, in Africa and everywhere in the world.

Jesus Christ “came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (Ephesians 2:17). The Church never tires in proclaiming the blessedness of reconciliation, justice and peace in the oftentimes unsure paths taken by the world and in the agonising moments of history. In doing so, the Church is faithful to her Lord who went about all cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity” (Mt 9:33).

Jesus Christ, while clearly affirming that his Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), gave many signs of it in the course of his life on earth by coming to the aid of people in spiritual and material need. The full realisation of the Kingdom will come about in heaven, when the elect, those reconciled to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will live the fullness of justice and peace in the communion of all the saints, among whom the Blessed Virgin Mary occupies a special place.

### **1. The challenge: A world reconciled and founded on justice and peace?**

There is no shortage of pronouncements that a world for everybody, reconciled and founded on justice and peace is an ambitious project, at best an illusion for it is set between the realms of the ideal and the excruciating realities of daily life. In simple language and in the view of many people, such a world is clearly not realisable. Besides two world wars (1914 – 1918; and 1939 – 1945) which was history's bloodiest within the last 100 years, with 110 millions dead and over 200 million migrants and refugees abandoned to fate, the excruciating reality of brutality dawned yet again as the Bible records show. Regional and local wars have continued in virtually all the continents of the world till date, claiming in a brutal manner, the lives of millions of innocent peoples, creating refugees, migrants and displaced persons. The case of Biafra is not distant. Police harassment on our roads is rampant. Kidnapping has set in and the woes are endless. The recent youth confrontation with the authorities of the University of Nigeria Nsukka and the wanton destruction of lives and property here and elsewhere stares us on constantly on the face. No country is safe and everywhere could be turned into a war front. This is not to mention the destruction of the environment, goods and property with its consequences and the trauma on people's psychology, morality and social harmony. For us considered as a people of faith however, a world for everybody, founded on the principles of justice peace and reconciliation is not only a realisable project, it is one that is achievable within time, that is, here on earth, with the concept of the "*adumbratio*", the "*already, but no yet*" fulfilled understanding of the kingdom of heaven.

At a time like this, we do owe ourselves some reckoning as humanity enters a key stage in its history. There are several and apparent claims to the fruits of civilisation of which we are part. We are witness to the manifold achievements that humanity was able to make in the past 100 years in the areas of the *sciences, art, technology, humanities, literature, economy, political and social life, spacecraft, medicine, agriculture, education, information and communications technology*. The list is endless. The concept of '*space*' and '*time*' which in ancient philosophy were beyond thought and speculation, have been given some practical solutions by virtue of recent developments in science and technology. Consequently, distances previously believed to be '*beyond space*' and issues thought to be '*beyond time*' have been conquered, at least in the sphere of the phenomena.

Mankind is able to master the external universe. But can mankind also show goodwill and acceptance of the universal and basic principle that all human beings are fundamentally equal with dignity, freedom and integrity; that truth exists and that all are able to know and reach this truth, despite the attempts at relativism; that faith and tolerance are virtues possible for human beings within the multiplicity and diversity of cultures; and that imbued with an immortal soul, given freely by a Supreme Being who is generous, kind, almighty and the universal judge of all that is created, all human beings have rights and duties imposed upon them by their conscience and would obtain salvation in their circumstances? These are questions which repeat themselves time and again.

The achievements of mankind in our times have led to a greater integration of peoples, economic exchanges, cultural influences and technological advances, leading to the present understanding that the whole world has become a '**global village**'. It is presumed to be a world for all, even though only a privileged few have the key to the door of this global village. Others must wait outside, treated as aliens, without rights and basic human dignity. This is the reality, increasingly so understood and practiced. What does this mean for the African peoples and cultures, for humanity at large, both in the northern and southern hemispheres, and especially for vulnerable groups and the poor everywhere? This is the challenge to the project: *A world for everybody*. An attempt to find answers to these questions leads to a reflection on the critical stages of today's world which has several defining characteristics:

- The *political climate* which shows that the winds of change (perestroika) triggered off in the late 1980's, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its effects blowing through countries of Eastern Europe, was not an exercise in isolation. In very remote villages of Africa, Asia and Latin America, these winds have come to blow with potential for radical changes at all levels of human endeavour. It has brought with it some instability in systems and assumptions previously held as sacrosanct. Military dictatorships and monarchies have changed into democratic governments. Political configurations have been broken up, sometimes peacefully, often by violence, of some states into smaller nations and countries (e.g. Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Czech, Slovakia). Countries like Rwanda and Burundi lost over 800,000 people in communal clashes in 1994, caused to some extent, by the inability to break away peacefully from Belgian colonial structures imposed on various African peoples binding them to political configurations that took no cognisance of cultural originality, social expressions and authenticity. On the other hand, there is development of the merging of some groups of nations and interest groups into unions, such as the European Union and the Africa

Union for the purposes of regional integration for peaceful existence, market linkages, political strategies and collaboration for mutual benefit.

- ***Economic exchanges*** include cross-border trade on goods and services, capital flows and financial investments. Today, almost two trillion dollars move around the world every day, seeking not the best production but the best return on speculation. Of the hundred largest economic entities in the world, fifty of them are trans-national corporations (Figures cited in “*The Rough to Globalization*”, a CAFOD paper, December 2000). This is contrasted with the fact that poverty is on the increase all over the world, not just in the developing countries, but also, for countries until now regarded as wealthy, highly industrialised and developed. With rising poverty are the rise in homelessness, hunger and lack of jobs especially of the youth. Poverty has assumed not only the forms of physical deprivation but has become worse in its spiritual manifestations as found in loneliness, emptiness, meaninglessness and escape from reality. Many people abandon their homes in forced or induced migrations, searching for a better state of life. They find instead in their new countries of migration, much of legal barriers, non-acceptance, prejudices and xenophobia that they are often cut between their desire for their original homes despite its problems, and the challenges of their new migrant addresses with its unfulfilled hopes, disappointments and exile spirit.
- ***Cultural influences*** are obvious in the “westernisation” of so much of popular culture in music, clothes, lifestyles, etc. Today, the single largest export industry for the United States of America is not aircrafts, automobiles, computers, but entertainment- found in Hollywood Films and Television Programmes. The globalisation of films has eroded the originality of self determination for simple peoples in their cultural milieu, making the American dream and way of life a measure for civilisation worldwide. Money has become a world formula, a new value and the mighty author of all things. This culture exposes many flaws and weaknesses. It is often based on a materialistic conception of the world, devoid of any spiritual meaning, thus the meaninglessness of the present time. Individualism is on the increase, leading to a “*global crisis of values*”. There is apparent lack of ethical and cultural ingredients in determining the global social and economic systems in the formulation of policies that guide peoples and nations as businesses carry on as usual, negating and neglecting people’s traditional ways of life, their history, indigenous rationality, social development and cultural values.
- ***Environmental issues*** emerge showing defects in the recognised control mechanisms adopted among various societies, particularly by dominant

western nations. Consumption patterns have increased. Specifically, one has to observe the horrendous waste of non-renewable resources; the dramatic and excessive burden on the environment's capacity to absorb pollution, and manifest damage caused the global ecological balance. People are having more than they are becoming persons with integrity. Furthermore, there is the debateable matter of population growth in agricultural regions of the developing world. This is a source of strength but could threaten the already delicate balance of resources in these regions. According to Daniel Lynch of Notre dame University, Indiana: "there is no technology to support 12 billion people at the current aggregate consumption rate; and there is no vision of a planetary ecosystem in equilibrium with this level of industrial metabolism".

- ***Technological advances and industrialisation*** have left their consequences on modern societies and systems which include the rapidly growing utilization of electronic communications, (internet, informatics, gsm telephones, telematics, e-mail) and the increasing ease of transportation. We live in an information age, a "*borderless age*" and a *very fast age*. With its many advantages, the explosion in scientific knowledge and technical knowledge and the availability of knowledge, capital and manpower shudders the imagination and questions the sustainability of the human family, for it makes it easier for people to manufacture bombs in their sleeping rooms or in private libraries by just opening the relevant pages on the search engine of their personal computers. If this is conceivable, then we are living in a dream. Yet it does seem in the present circumstances that industrialisation will continue unabated worldwide. It is desirable. But can we have industrialisation based on some values? It has been said that sustainability demands of an integral vision of the universe which respects the integrity of creation. If this is not done, it does seem that what we are building worldwide may not work without a strong value orientation. Value disorientation and a missing emphasis on the common good is a critical factor which humanity cannot overlook without consequences for the soul of humanity. And this is the crux of the matter.

## **2. Communicating Faith in the Diversity of Cultures:**

Although there is evidence of many diocesans of Nsukka area embracing Christianity and modernity, gaps exist as findings show that there are still large numbers of people who are traditional worshippers, Muslims or even brethren of other Christian persuasions. The reality on ground is that there is no homogenous religious affiliation of the people, a situation that calls for reflection. To communicate faith within the diversity of cultures, prejudices and until now received and perceived attitudes of one people or group against another must give way for a "*dialogue of cultures and civilisations*" to emerge.

The opposite is a “*clash of cultures*” which does no one good, continues the intolerance. The clash of cultures promotes the fight for dominance and does not give room for intercultural dialogue which is the basis for peace and progress in the world of today. *The condition for achieving this starting point towards a communication of faith is tolerance, mutual respect and the assumption that no one has the monopoly of the truth.*

After several centuries of inter human contacts, it is sad to witness how wars are carried out in the name of religion and martyrs are made to die for their beliefs even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One lesson that humanity must learn is that we cannot communicate faith from the point of view of a missionary superiority model known as the top down method, acting as a group who knows it all, have all the answers and are better than the others. The Christian principle of the “*incarnation*” is that the “*Word assumed Flesh and lived among us*”, a best example of how to communicate faith, in humility and **DIALOGUE**, which is the principle of God communicating with humankind in understandable language and manner, “*down to earth*”.

Within the context of the on-going and ever growing meeting of peoples of the world on several levels (political, cultural, social, economic, religious, academia, art) in what is termed a ‘global village’, one is somehow amazed that ‘*global neighbourliness*’ has not been achieved. In fact, the tendency that is increasing in the world is towards ‘*global distance*’ both in thought and in action. With technological and telecommunication possibilities increasing in an ever expanding economic globalisation process, conflicts seem on the rise also, thus making differences noticeable and more explicit. Especially on the forum of faith and cultural diversities with its attendant international debates, is this factor of differences more fundamentalist and aggressive. The search for balance between “*particularisms*” and “*universalisms*” continues, leading to the mentioned conflicts, often culminating in wars. Examples abound worldwide and history books are filled with such examples.

These conflicts are escalated by latent prejudices, complexes of superiority and inferiority art, fixations, attitudinal inhibitions, exotic sentimentalisms, negative patriotisms all of which make the need for a deeper reflection and research in inter human and intercultural dialogue necessary. Besides football where football fans and their nations side their favourite teams, in a general patriotism that is acceptable (which is a lighter matter), the dialectic between “*US*” and “*THEM*” seems on the increase. The dialectic and scope of conflict is sometimes widened in ideological categories based on rationalised dichotomies and contrary positions on either side, without giving way to each others point of view, so that an antinomy is placed between the categories of “*US and THEM*”; “*the individual and the community*”, “*faith versus life*”, “*knowledge versus experience*”, “*religion versus disbelief*”, “*relativism versus ethics*”, “*the*

*employer versus the employee*”, “*the particular versus the universals*”, to mention but a few areas of such dualistic extremes. These dualisms increase when legitimate instruments of survival and communication are placed under the excruciating pressure of hegemonies and dominant claims, thus the “might is right philosophy”.

Thus language, myth, religion, political lifestyles and social institutions, the economy, education, identity, family, ethnicity, race, or nation among others which are modes of expression of and by a particular people are challenged to either disappear by force or get integrated into a universal categorisation for which, resistance by the group is met by annihilation, force or conflicts, sometimes, on scales of massive destruction, wars, acrimony, conquest and complete dehumanization. Examples abound in history for this postulation, thus the slogan: “*I am black and proud*” is expressed as a rational and positive justification in the attempt of the Black American to establish legitimate difference against a society where being black was considered “*second class*”.

We may immediately assert at this stage that conflicts could be avoided if rational positions held sway and the principle of legitimate acceptance of differences even in universalistic categories were determinant. The modus would thus be unity in diversity, identity in plurality, individuality in communality, divergence and plurality in monolithic ideologies and dialogue as the fair platform for intercultural and interfaith relationships. There is no alternative to dialogue if humanity would survive on interdependence, not just independence.

The Igbo proverb expresses best the need and understanding for intercultural dialogue and exchange for the survival of all. “*Onye anwuna ma ibe ya efuna*” is a way of life, a proverb which literally translated, means: “*Live and let live*”. This is the basis of tolerance, much needed in communicating faith in the diversity of cultures. Yet, in the last five years (2000 – 2005), over 10,000 people have been killed in Nigeria in clashes that have both cultural social, political and religious bias as its cause. The tragedy of it all is that these clashes have nothing to do with the wisdom thoughts of these people, but is linked to the newly imported ideological differences from other countries, both from the west and the Islamic countries of the North and the East which continue to trigger off the conflicts Nigeria currently goes through. One would even assert that if Nigerians lived according to their original indigenous beliefs and practices, communicating faith would be much more a matter of life than of doctrine. Nigerians like many African peoples believe that “*actions speak louder than words*”.

Faith is communicated more through a convincing lifestyle than through preaching. In this society, *orthopraxis* is more cherished than *orthodoxy*. In

one Nigerian family, one finds a Christian, a Muslim, a traditional worshipper and liberal thinkers, all living harmoniously in one family. The Nigerian context thus, is a situation where tolerance and acceptance of the other is basic, not because of what one believes on the level of faith, but on how this faith is lived out in real life. The proverb: “*Onye na chi ya*” which means “*Each with his or her own destiny*” made any ideological fight on whose god is superior a principle of life. There was hardly a war fought over religion and its tenets.

It is important to mention that traditional values which are indeed African values show the importance of integrating cultural values into real life through pedagogy of practice which is lived faith than just a theoretical didactic method. The global outlook has shown a tendency to ideological socio-technological and economic paradigms which is a western contribution to development. African values are non ideological, they are life, thus the Igbo saying that “*Ezi Okwu bu ndu*”, literally meaning that “*Truth is life*”.

Africa’s traditional value systems provide a basis for a dialogue of life, not just a superiority of ideas, making communal living together possible. Through its communal philosophy which is the principle of the family, the large family and the clan consciousness made sure that all had a place and “*no one is an island*”. It encourages consensus building instead of individualism, promotes social responsibility, entrepreneurship, justice and fair play. “*Egbe belu Ugo belu*”, which means co-existence becoming a key principle of life: “*let the Kite perch and let the Eagle perch*”.

To conclude, communicating faith in the diversity of cultures is possible based on the African context where humanity’s most authentic and distinctive features nurture a cultural soil which makes for a fruitful and constructive dialogue. In this context, religion and its beliefs is not the point of departure. What counts is life and people’s behaviour. As in the letter of St James in the New Testament, the African would say to the theme under discussion concerning communicating faith in the diversity of cultures:

“*Show me your faith and I will show you my works. For faith without works is dead*” (James 2).

Thus, universal values of solidarity are expressed in the promotion of justice; the value of peace which is the primary objective of every society; the value of life itself as the most sacred and inviolable earthly reality, for it is not possible to invoke peace and despise life; the value of education which enables regard for one’s own identity with an understanding of others and respect for diversity; the values of forgiveness and reconciliation necessary for building bridges over the barriers caused by non-communication and misunderstandings, thereby, nurturing the path which leads to peace.

### 3. The Africa Synod on Reconciliation Justice and Peace

„*Be reconciled to God*“ (2 Corinthians 5:20). This pressing invitation to the Christians of Corinth and the whole world addressed in a special way to Christ’s faithful and all people of good will in Africa including Nsukka Diocesans. Our situation shows manifold social and religious divisions, inequities and poverty, all due to the personal sins committed with negative ramifications caused by humans in society. At the same time, they display the urgent character of the work of reconciliation to God and neighbour. God the Father, in his infinite goodness and never ending mercy, initiates the process of reconciliation through the workings of the Holy Spirit.

He has reconciled us to himself through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who has entrusted to his Church the ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor 5:19). To accomplish this task, the Risen Lord gave his Holy Spirit to his disciples for the forgiveness of sins (Cf John 20: 23). Central to the reconciliation between God and humanity is the pierced heart of the crucified Lord, from which blood and water continue to flow (cf. John 19:34) in the sacrament of our salvation. Through the cross, Jesus Christ has reconciled two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, destroying hostility between them and making them one body (cf. Ephesians 3: 14 – 16).

Unfortunately, not everyone accepts Jesus and the gifts of his peace. In his battle with the darkness of sin and death, the Lord himself became a sign of contradiction (Lk 2: 34). He cried over the fate of Jerusalem, because she did not know the way of peace (cf. Luke 19:42). Despite the trials, Christ’s faithful have received the promises of the Lord’s peace, because he overcame the world (cf. John 16:33). We exchange the Lord’s peace during the Eucharistic Liturgy, before proceeding to receive Holy Communion.

„*Peace to this house!*“ (Luke 10:5). In following the Lord Jesus Christ’s faithful are called to be peacemakers. Those who do this work will be blessed and called children of God (Mt 5:9). Peace is the great gift which Christ’s disciples must proclaim to everyone, according to the mandate received from the Father (cf. John 20:21). This mission of peace has never been more timely in Africa, because of her conflicts, wars and violence. Seeking peace requires various honourable relations. Peace has personal, familial and communitarian aspects. To the sinful, penitent woman, the Lord offers forgiveness and peace (cf. Luke 7:50). The disciples bring peace to the people they visited in their homes (cf. Mt 10:13; Luke 10:5- 6). Peace is destined in every way for everyone, starting with the disciples themselves: „*Be at peace with one another*“ (cf. Mt 9:50).

#### **4. Practical Applications:**

The tasks to be accomplished are enormous and I mention just a few of the following aspects for consideration by this Synod with reference to the practical applications of the theme of reconciliation, justice and peace:

- The family which is the first Church and the foundation of society;
- The dignity of women in both Church and society which needs to be fostered and elevated, integrated and better promoted and protected;
- Self sufficiency of the local Church and of its peoples and structures through the guarantee of financial and material wherewithal for the fight against poverty, disease, ignorance, superstition and oppression; One would think in this context of the establishment of micro finance and income generation projects that benefit the people;
- Political and social liberty whereby people are enabled to regain their dignity and human rights to self determination and originality; This includes all efforts towards legitimate political representation, electoral reforms, civic duties of voting and being voted into positions and mobilisation of people to be constructively engaged.
- Prophetic mission whereby the Church remains the advocate and voice of the voiceless through its Justice and Peace Commissions, the Caritas Organs and all other forms of charitable organisations where human development and human potentials are championed;
- The promotion of a culture of dialogue within the Church and the larger Society whereby between the clergy, the lay faithful and the hierarchy, there is openness. Forgiveness, union, mutual respect and access to shared information, equal and fair hearing, justice and charity.

May the signs of the Kingdom be increasingly multiplied for the good of the Catholic Church in Nsukka diocese; may this Synod usher in a new beginning, a Syn-hodos, (walking and working together) for the re-awakening and the „*adumbratio*“ mentioned in the prophets showing „*the already begun, but not yet fulfilled kingdom, the pre-shadow*“ of the reconciliation, justice and peace which is our common human aspirations for Nsukka Diocesans, its peoples and neighbourhood particularly at this time.

I thank you once again for the great honour and for your patient and rapt attention, and now look forward to sharing your questions and suggestions.