

SOLEMNITY OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA

Makeni Cathedral 13th May 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are here this morning in our Cathedral to celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lady of Fatima, Patroness of our Diocese; to Her this Cathedral has been dedicated.

It has been our tradition to celebrate this feast all together, diocesan clergy, religious men and women and the laity. Representatives from the 26 parishes of our Diocese and the St. Andrew's Chaplaincy at Teko Barracks used to gather here in the Cathedral all together.

This year, only few of us are here, but we represent the whole Diocese; all the Catholics of the Diocese of Makeni are spiritually present in this cathedral, they are praying with us. I want to thank Radio Maria for broadcasting this celebration.

This is a special occasion to pray to Mary, our Mother, to protect our Diocese, our beloved country and the whole world from this deadly virus. We beg her to intercede for us before her Son: only God can preserve our lives.

Mary, who was at the same time Mother and the first disciple of Jesus, is the best example to follow, if we want to be real disciples of Jesus. Not because being the mother of Jesus, she thought that she had completed her task already, no, she, as all the other disciples, was trying to understand the mission of her Son, his message and to follow his example and teaching.

Mary was with Jesus during all his life, from the day of his birth, passing through the Calvary, until the day of his ascension into heaven. Mary never abandoned Jesus, despite many constrains, problems, difficulties and pain. She fulfilled her mission faithfully.

How are we living our faith in this moment of trial? What are we, the disciples of Jesus, doing to contribute to face the consequences of this new pandemic?

Only five years ago, we have experienced the tragedy of the Ebola virus. All together, as a Country, we were able to defeat the virus, but the price was very high, thousands of brothers and sisters lost their lives, the country ended up with a severe financial crisis that is still conditioning the life of many Sierra Leoneans to the present day.

The present pandemic is more dangerous, the corona virus is an enemy that we do not know where it is hiding, the people are full of fear. The number of infected people and of deaths so far is not as high as it was with Ebola, but we are afraid.

I commend all our brothers and sisters who are engaged in the fight against the global pandemic that is ravaging our world and now also the African continent. We pray for the repose of the souls of all who have died as a result of the pandemic, and that God may

bring healing to those who are sick and consolation to the bereaved.

I thank the government, the front line health workers, the security forces and all those involved in bringing to an end this crisis in our country. Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad have demonstrated solidarity in providing funds, food items and other necessities for their needy and vulnerable brothers and sisters.

As a Church, we continue to complement the efforts of the government through works of charity, distributing food, non- food items, psycho-social support, undertaken by our Diocesan Caritas and our Catholic partners in the country: Catholic Relief Services, Cord Aid, Trocaire; Cafod, Caritas Italy, etc.... Our hospitals and clinics will continue to provide health services to all.

Unfortunately, I realize that in recent weeks the corona virus not only brought fear, poverty and death, but also has reinforced division in the country and provoke violence. The recent events have created cause for concern as we strive to consolidate our fragile democracy.

In a particular way, I condemn the loss of lives and properties, which took place in different places in the Country, at Pademba Prison in Freetown, at Lunsar, at Tombo. I call for a speedy investigation into the causes of these riots so that justice and the rule of law should prevail in these circumstances. The doctrine of the Church reminds all of us that every human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person must be respected at all levels and at all times.

We, the Catholic Church, condemn every form of violence and appeal for constructive dialogue with all concerned and that peace and order may be restored in all communities. Dialogue is the way to justice and peace. Violence produce more violence, dialogue produce peace.

There have been growing political tensions expressed in hate messages through social media, trading of accusations by political parties, incitement through audio messages, fanning of tribal rhetoric through various media channels. This is not good for Sierra Leone. Our history has been blighted by tribalism, revenge, civil war, while the poor and vulnerable bearing the brunt of our madness. Sierra Leoneans have suffered enough! I condemn anyone, any institution, political parties that are inciting and advocating chaos and mayhem. I condemn any arbitrary arrest and detention without the due process of law. The RULE OF LAW should prevail at all times!

I appeal to the political parties not to fan the flame of tribalism, regionalism, revenge, division, but to act responsibly in promoting the common good. I call upon all the people of good will to engage in responsible dialogue on matters of State security and welfare of all Sierra Leoneans. If we want to build a solid nation; we have to seek the common good, through justice and peace. We are brothers and sisters, children of the same God. I encourage you, as your pastor in the faith, to bring hope, light and justice in our communities.

May Mary, our Lady of Fatima, pray and intercede for all of us, for our diocese and our beloved country.

God bless you all.