

**ARCHBISHOP AUGUSTINE AKUBEZE HOMILY AT THE MASS BEFORE THE
BLESSING OF THE NEW CHANCERY BUILDING ON 2 OCTOBER 2019 AT
SAINT PAUL CATHOLIC CHURCH BENIN CITY**

**THEME: YOUR GUARDIAN ANGEL IS YOUR DIVINE BODY AND
SPIRITUAL GUARD**

1. PROTOCOL: Your Eminence, Anthony Cardinal Okogie, Emeritus Archbishop of Lagos, Your Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Patrick Ebosele Ekpu, Emeritus Archbishop of Benin City, Very Rev. Frs., and Rev. Frs., Consecrated Persons, and the lay faithful, glory be to Jesus. Honour to Mary. I greet all of you who have honoured our invitation to join us in thanking God for the successful completion of the new Chancery building.

2. GRATITUDE: I will like to begin by thanking God Almighty who inspired us and gave us the resources to complete the edifice we are going to bless after this Mass. Given the economic challenges and the many competing projects in the Church, one needed the special grace of God to have the courage to begin this work. We started working about two years ago. We started quietly, and with time we discovered that the project was going well, albeit financially demanding. But God who always supplies the resources for his work never left us.

The Church is grateful to some donors who contributed to this building. May God bless all of them abundantly. We are very grateful to those who worked in this project. We thank Architect Mike Ebesunu who designed the edifice. We thank Mr. Rufus Oyebanji, all those who supplied quality materials at very good prices because of their love for the Church. May God bless all of you.

In the spirit of gratitude, we want to say thank you to His Eminence Anthony Cardinal Okogie who has deep love for the Archdiocese of Benin

City. A love that was present during his leadership of the Church in Lagos, a love that was present when Benin City was a suffragan under Lagos. It was under His Eminence that the diocese of Benin City became an Archdiocese. We are grateful for the prophetic voice of this great son of Edo who has spoken out against every evil in the society. He is not afraid to speak truth to power. We are grateful to this triple prince. A prince from the royal family of Oyo Empire; a prince from the Royal Family of Uromi and a Prince of the Church as a Cardinal. Your Eminence, we are proud to claim you as a true son of Edo. A prince who has transformed the ecclesiastical terrain of Lagos. We are grateful to you for honouring us with your presence.

In our midst is Archbishop Patrick Ebosele Ekpu, the First indigenous Bishop of Benin City; the First Archbishop of Benin City. In Archbishop Ekpu we see the embodiment of wisdom, meticulous planning and discipline; a discipline that is clearly shown in the administrative systems set up in the Archdiocese of Benin City by him. He has established a decorum and structures that many dioceses in Nigeria are modelling their governance after; in him we see a simple and gentle prelate of the Church who makes decisions without fear or favour. We are grateful to him because he established many structures that are still of great benefit to the Church in Benin City. Your Grace, we are grateful to you for the leadership you provided when you governed the Church in Benin City. Under your leadership, the Dioceses of Auchi and Uromi were created. I consider myself privileged to be a successor to the See you once governed with love and care for the flock. Your Grace, thank you very much for coming.

3. THE CHANCERY BUILDING: When we decided to build this new chancery, we were motivated by the growth in the various sections in the Chancery. We saw the need for expansion, an expansion that was

inspired by the need for more efficiency. With the new edifice we will now have offices that are in consonance with modern day facilities and requirements. We have built this edifice to enable us serve the people of God better. We are called to serve God's people and we must do everything within our power to give them better service. The Diocesan Curia housed by the chancery is one of the facilities provided to serve the people of God.

We read in the Code of Canon Law that the diocesan curia consists of those institutions and persons which assist the bishop in the governance of the whole diocese, especially in providing pastoral action in caring for the administration of the diocese and in exercising judicial power (Canon 469). While the Cathedral Church represents the symbol of the authority of the diocesan bishop, the chancery is the place where the administration of the diocese takes place.

In this new edifice we will have offices for the Vicar General, all Episcopal Vicars, Directors of Commissions, and other institutions of the Curia as we shall determine as time goes on. As we thank God today for this opportunity, it is also a time for us to know that we must be ready to work harder. I thank all my close collaborators, all the priests working in the Archdiocese, the members of the Presbyterial council, the College of Consultors, Pastoral Council, Finance Council, Marriage Tribunal and the Curia officers. All of you now have a better place to work and the outcome should be for the greater glory of God and for the good of the people of the Archdiocese of Benin City.

4. THE FEAST OF THE GUARDIAN ANGELS: A few days ago, we celebrated the feast of the Archangels, Gabriel, Michael and Raphael. Gabriel brings good news; Michael brings protection in spiritual battle and Raphael brings healing. Today we honour the Guardian angels, the help that God gives to each one of us. The teachings on the existence of

angels are part of the Dogma of the Christian faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 328 states: “The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls “angels” is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition.” In another section the Catechism states: “From infancy to death human life is surrounded by their (the angels) watchful care and intercession. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life. Already here on earth the Christian life shared by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united to God.”

This means angels are spiritual beings that inhabit God’s creation. They are not just symbols but beings with will. Secondly, Christ is the centre and head of the angelic world. Angels are the agents of Christ. They were created for a purpose and they have a mission. The word “angels” points to their mission or office as messengers rather than their nature. Thirdly, they are given to us as helpers and guides so that in this life we are already in contact with the heavenly host as they join us in prayer at every Mass. Just as God gave angels to guide the Israelites in their journey from Egypt so also God has given each one of us a guardian angel.

The teaching of St. Bernard we read in today’s office of the reading stated that the guardian angels should inspire us with respect, devotion and confidence. We should respect their presence among us, and therefore fear no evil attack. They are our divine body and soul guard. They help ward away evil from us. The guardian angels are signs of God’s love for us. God has given them to us to help us on our way to heaven. God has given a guardian angel to everyone irrespective of whether they believe in angels or not. Whether a person is holy or not, he or she has a guardian angel. This speaks of God’s abundant love for us.

To the many who are here today, who are afraid of all sorts of demonic attacks, I have good news for you. To many who are here today, who have received news that people are after you and that they have gone to meet those with diabolic powers to harm you or your children, I have good news for you. To many of you who keep holding on to the believe that there are evil forces working against your success, I have good news for you today. To many who are sick and the doctors have not been able to diagnose the true cause of illness and many have concluded that this is not ordinary sickness, I have good news for you. To those who say there is ancestral family cause hindering their progress, I have good news for you today. The good news is that you have a spiritual bodyguard, you have a spiritual soul guard, you have a guardian angel equipped by God to defend you. You do not have to be afraid of any evil spirit. The angel of God always defeats the angel of evil. Yes, the evil one will try to destroy you, but if you always have connection with your guardian angel, those against you cannot do you any harm to you.

5. DEVOTION TO THE GUARDIAN ANGEL: Many of us relate only with what we can see with our eyes. But in the creed, we profess belief in God who created the visible and invisible world. We must know always that there is invisible world. In the invisible world we have our guardian angels. We should develop devotion to them. Pray to them as we travel for their guidance, thank them after we return from a journey for their help. Call on them before we go to bed to watch over us and thank them when we wake up for their protection. Be conscious of their presence every time in our life. Such consciousness should help us avoid offending God through sin. When we remember that God's angel is with us and wants us to obey God's commandment we should turn away from that temptation. Consciousness of the guardian angels should help us keep our sexual purity; it should help us to extend a helping hand to a brother or sister in need; it should help us to speak kindly of others and avoid

gossiping. Just remember whenever you want to do something bad that your guardian angel is there. Sent by God to help you do what is right and good always.

I encourage us to pray daily the prayer to our guardian angel that says:

Angel of God,
my guardian dear,
To whom God's love
commits me here,
Ever this day,
be at my side,
To light and guard,
Rule and guide.
Amen.

6. CONCLUSION: Dearly beloved in Christ, we are once again reassured of God's loving care for us. Let nothing make you despair because we worship God whose love for us is everlasting. Even if things are not going well for you know that God is with you. When things are going well for you know that God is with you. God is not a fair-weather friend. His friendship is everlasting. That is why he has given us guardian angels to lead us, to intercede for us and to guide us on our way to heaven. It is my prayers that we will call on our guardian angels always for their protection and guidance.

Yesterday was our Independence Day. Many Nigerians think that we are not independent from poverty, we are not independent from insecurity, we are not independent from corruption. We are not independent from many things that hinder our progress as a people. Yet, we have 59 years of self-governance. Dearly beloved in Christ, let us hope for a brighter future. Let us keep praying for a better and greater Nigeria. A Nigeria where it will not matter where the leader comes from. A Nigeria where development will spread to every part. A Nigeria where the Green Passport will not raise suspicion by immigration officers in other

countries. A Nigeria where there will be no need for brain drain because the country will be good enough to keep our best. A Nigeria where ethnic and religious differences will not matter in appointing people to offices. A Nigeria where merit will trump connection for appointments. A Nigeria where everyone will feel welcomed in every part of the country. Let us continue to pray and hope for this Nigeria. Prayer for Nigeria in distress should continue in all our parishes.

Once again, I thank all of you for coming out to join us in this Mass. After the final blessing we shall proceed to the new building to bless it. We are blessing it because we want God to take control of the building and to assist all those who will meet in the building so that their deliberations will be inspired by God. We want God to bless all those who will enter the building so that the place will be where God's will would be carried out through administrative decisions made by me, my successors and my collaborators. May God continue to bless us as we continue to serve him in this world and seek eternal happiness with him in the life to come. Amen. May God bless his words in our hearts and may our Mother Mary, Queen of Angels intercede for us always through Christ our Lord. Amen.