

A report on the seminar themed, “Caring For Our Environment: A Presentation of Pope Francis’ Laudato Si presented to members of staff in the Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta by Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi; the Education Secretary, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria held at St. Bernadette Nursery & Primary School, Onikolobo, Abeokuta on 2nd September, 2021.

The meeting started at about 10.14 am with an opening prayer said by Rev. Sr. Rosemary Etim; the Head of School, St. Bernadette of Lourdes, Ake. The Heads of Schools present were ushered to the high table while Rev. Fr. Daniel Isah moderated the event after giving the welcome address. His Lordship Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo, the Bishop of Abeokuta Diocese was in attendance. The Director of Education, Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta in the person of Rev. Fr. Patrick Oke gave an opening remark and encouraged everyone present to make the best of the talk to be delivered. All schools; 10 Nursery and Primary Schools and 5 Secondary Schools in the Diocese were greatly represented.

Introduction

Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi stated that the issue of protecting our environment has bothered many observers and scholars for a long time and began the lecture by mentioning that in June 2019, Catholic educational leaders from all over the world gathered in New York to brainstorm on the way forward for Catholic education. This was centered on protecting our environment, ensuring that the air we breathe is not polluted, the water we drink is safe for consumption and our immediate environment is taken care of, forests are being decimated while plants and animals are going into extinction and all these have been traced to the way man handles the earth, ‘our common home’. He further stated that the way we treat the environment is directly related to how the environment treats us.

The goals of the Laudato Si were broken down into:-

1. Dialogue where Pope Francis aims at appealing for a new dialogue about how to shape the future of the planet.
2. A call to ecological conversion of all Christians where the Christians can liken their encounter with their relationship with Jesus Christ and their environment. Laudato Si concerns itself with what goes on in the environment and how the lack of care by man’s daily activity is making the earth less rich and beautiful.

What is the significance of Laudato Si? It brings the issue of the environment; ‘our common home’ from being just a mere concern but to care for the environment and making it a part of our daily roles and activities.

Rev. Fr. Okochi stated that we can help our immediate environment and the earth in general by formulating environmental protection policies, develop the habit of simple living, having direct and physical contacts with nature, developing the culture of recycling rather than burning, help to encourage the trees in our environment to grow rather than burning them down.

In conclusion, Rev. Fr. Okochi called on the good will of everyone both Christians and non-Christians to take time out and pay more attention to the environment; our common home rather than abusing it and stated that the Pope is inviting humanity to save itself from self-destruction.

Members of staff present were encouraged to ask questions and among them were:

1. In other to save the earth, do we stop eating meat?

A: Rev. Fr. Okochi responded by saying that humans need animals and vice versa and

Encouraged that the human focus should be on replacing the animals through reproduction of livestock

2. How can paper be recycled rather than being burnt?

A: Rev. Fr. Okochi stated that waste papers can be taken to recycling centers and encouraged everyone present to look out for such centers in their various locations

3. How can the Directorate of Education have a curriculum separate from the Government?

A: Several mails and reminders have been sent to the concerned Government body and no responses have been received yet in that regard.

What can we do to help? As a community in the Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta, the Schools have decided to embark on various steps to keep the environment healthy and green by planting trees,

- separate perishable from non-perishable goods,
- implementing and encouraging recycling of waste products,

- enlighten the students and in turn sensitize their parents to be fully aware on how to care for the earth,
- formulate environmental protection policies
- start the planting of trees; if you remove one plant ten
- find happiness in simple things and find time to be with others
- teach kids how to respect the use of things around them. Teach them etiquette, how to show respect, take care of others, ask permission politely and learn the use of courtesies.

The paper delivered was a call to humanity to spare a thought for our much-abused common home and take steps to care for our environment.

Vote of thanks was given by Chief Solomon Umoke; the Head of School, St. Peter Catholic College Olomore wherein he thanked our Lord Bishop Most Rev. Dr. Peter Olukayode Odetoyinbo for all the fatherly love and care he keeps extending to the schools in the Diocese.

The closing prayer was said by Mr. Lewis; a staff of Sacred Heart Catholic College, Oke-Ilewo and the final blessing was given by our Lord Bishop. The seminar came to an end at 1.30pm.