

Communiqué

A Communiqué issued by the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) at the End of its Ninth Annual Convention Held at Bishop Patrick Kelly Pastoral Centre, Benin City, from 25th to 28th October 2016

Preamble

The Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria held its 9th Annual Convention at the Bishop Patrick Kelly Pastoral Centre in Benin City from 25th to 28th October 2016. The theme of the conference, “Mercy and Justice in the Bible”, took its inspiration from the theme of the Extra-ordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, 8 December 2015, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, to 20 November 2016, Solemnity of Christ the King. The convention was graced by the presence of His Lordship, Most Rev. Martin Olorunmolu, Bishop of Lokoja, while the chief host was His Grace, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze, the Archbishop of Benin City. After prayerful discussions and deliberations, we issue the following communiqué to the people of God and to all men and women of goodwill:

1. Appreciating the Immensity of God’s Mercy

We are grateful to God for his unfathomable mercy which supersedes all we could know of him. Like Mary of Nazareth in her Magnificat, our duty, as community and individuals, is to always sing the praise of God whose mercy for us endures forever. His mercy is unconditional. It is available to all, no matter the magnitude of our sin. In whatever condition we find ourselves, we should make it a duty to show profound gratitude for the mercy of God.

2. Mercy and Justice as Attributes of God

In revealing himself, God entered into a long history of relationship with his people throughout which he has shown that mercy and justice are essential attributes of his nature. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (Ps 89:14; 97:2). To Moses, he revealed that he is “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Exod 34:6-7). Justice is specifically God’s action in favour of his people, and through mercy God expresses his untiring fidelity and completely gratuitous and unmerited motherly affection for us. The entire salvation history is an expression of God’s justice and mercy on behalf of sinful human beings. This mercy of God is revealed in a climactic manner in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has revealed that in his justice, he does not condone sin and unfaithfulness, but it belongs to his nature to temper justice with mercy.

3. Human Response to God’s Mercy and Justice

God's actions of mercy and justice demand our response, which is to accept his mercy and be instruments of his mercy in the world. We are also invited to learn from God in his dealings with human beings, especially the weak and the unworthy. Our response to God's mercy also includes our effort to acknowledge our sins and to return to the merciful Father in genuine repentance. We are called to believe that God's grace precedes every effort at repentance. All who are suffering and who feel that God is distant should have recourse to the mercy of God who forgives and who cannot abandon his children. God does not give up on anyone; and we should not give up on God.

4. Implications for Christian and Social Life

We encourage all to ensure that mercy, not punishment or revenge, has a primary place in our relationships. We should be known by our readiness to embrace others through forgiveness and to share our home with them without placing any conditions. We urge all to welcome and celebrate with gratitude God's disposition to show mercy to others and to rejoice with those who have been shown mercy. Our attitude to "sinners" must include the consciousness of our limitedness in understanding the mystery of salvation. God retains the prerogative of the last verdict.

5. Conclusion

The demands which the mercy of God makes on us imply that at the end of this Jubilee Year, after the closure of the door of mercy, mercy will continue to be an open door in our hearts and hold its place and bear its fruit in our lives. We pray that the fruits of mercy will become more concrete in our lives as we make better efforts to imitate Jesus Christ, the visible face of the Father who "is rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4). May the Spirit of God incline our hearts and inspire our actions to become merciful like the heavenly Father.

Signed

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Secretary

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