

DUAL CITIZENSHIP!!!

There are memorable days of my life that I will never forget; one of those is the 4th of September 2019. It was on the 4th of September 2019 that I went down to Weybridge Register Office and in an Individual and Private Ceremony before the Registrar, my Spiritual Director, my aunt, and my closest friends, I swore an Oath of Allegiance to HRH Queen Elizabeth II, signed it and became a British Citizen with all the Rights and Privileges therein. My decision to become a British Citizen was not a simple one; an encounter I had during one of my travels outside the UK led me to make that decision.

Early 2017, I went on a pilgrimage with a group of friends who are British by birth or by Naturalisation. It was a great and spirit-filled pilgrimage. The pilgrimage gave us the opportunity to deepen our relationship with God, bond with each other deeper and encouraged each other on our journeys in life. At the end of the pilgrimage, we were driven to the airport for the journey back to the UK. After checking in, we queued for the Security Checks as you do in all airports; that was where things changed. Two Security Guards who were patrolling that part of the airport came to where we were and singled me out. Initially, I thought nothing of it since I was used to unusual interrogations during my travels outside the UK with my Nigerian Passport. They asked me for my International Passport which I produced; when they saw it was a Nigerian Passport, they asked me to follow them, and I obeyed. When we got away from my group a little bit, they began interrogating me on the purpose of my presence in their country, how long I was there for and what I did for a living to have afforded such a pilgrimage. Since I knew the drill, I answered all their questions calmly, showed them my current bank statement and pay slips, and asked if I could be allowed to continue my journey. It was at this point that all my friends who had been observing my interrogation, approached the officers and told them they were being racist and should end the interrogation or they would be reported. The officers apologised and asked me to go. All my friends gave me a group hug that almost suffocated me, and they kept checking on me throughout the journey home. When I got back to UK after that pilgrimage, I made up my mind that I must take up British Citizenship since I was already qualified for it. Since taking up my Dual Citizenship on the 4th of September till date, nobody has ever stopped and questioned me at any airport – All thanks to the British Passport and the e-Gates. It is this Dual Citizenship which we all have as God's Children and Children of the State, that we encounter in today's Readings.

In today's First Reading from Prophet Isaiah Chapter 45, we encounter King Cyrus and his Dual Citizenship. Although he was a pagan and had no knowledge of God; however, since King Cyrus was created in the image and likeness of God, God anointed him, and chose him to be the one to subdue nations, strip kings of their loins and liberated the people of Israel from their years of slavery. Yes, King Cyrus was both a Citizen of the World/State and a Citizen of Heaven whom God elected to manifest His glory. In today's Gospel from Matthew Chapter 22, we hear of this Dual Citizenship from Christ Himself. When the Pharisees and Herodians set a trap for Him, Christ decided to play the ultimate Chess on them. In answering them, Christ stated: *Apodote oun ta Kaisaros Kaisari, kai ta tou Theou to Theo* – Give back therefore the things of

Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God. The crux of the above statement of Jesus lies in the first word – *Apodote* which comes from the Greek word *Apodidomi* which means to render what is due or to discharge an obligation.

My friends, as people with Dual Citizenship, it behoves on us to render what is due both to the State and to God. Whether we see ourselves as belonging to God first and the State second or vice versa, there are Duties, Rights and Obligations entrusted on us which we ought to fulfil without shying away from them.

In the early 17th Century and when every Christian was striving to outdo one another in devotion and piety, there was a breakdown in societal and ecclesiological order. To save the day, St Francis De Sales wrote the book – **Introduction to Devout Life**. The summary of the entire book is this profound statement: “When God created the world, He commanded each tree to bear fruit after its kind; and even so He bids Christians, the living trees of His Church, to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. A different exercise of devotion is required of each – the noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden, and the wife; and furthermore, such practice must be modified according to the strength, the calling, and the duties of each individual.” Yes, married people should not aspire to pray like monks and monks should never hope to pray like people in the world.

Before the dawn of the 21st Century and when Christians were not sure what their role in the world ought to be, Pope John Paul II in 1988, issued the Letter – *Christifideles Laici*, where he stated: “The lay faithful, in fact, "are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others" Thus for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well. In fact, in their situation in the world God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of "seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God””.

My friends, as people with Dual Citizenship of the World and of Heaven, we are called to play active, decisive, and positively transforming roles in the world, making it a better place for all. We are equally tasked with transforming the Church that it becomes more open, honest, transparent, accountable; more welcoming, accepting, loving, accommodating, and forgiving of all peoples. This is what Pope Francis asks us to do as we celebrate World Mission Sunday today. May we become missionary disciples, whose hearts are on fire and their feet on the move, we render our dues to the world and to God in honour of the Dual Citizenship we all have and should be proud of.

Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (22/10/2023)