

## Homily for the Funeral Mass of Richard Cardinal Kuuia Baawobr

Wa, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2023

*“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day”*. In these words Jesus certainly reveals much about the Eucharist, the sacrament that we are gathered to celebrate this morning. He also reveals an essential dimension and sense of our existence.

It is in the Eucharist that Jesus’ gives his flesh and blood. This morning, in this celebration, Jesus is offering his body and blood. In a while, the main celebrant will be taking bread and with all the Bishops and priests gathered here, he will repeat the Lord’s words saying: “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you”. He will do the same with the wine inviting us to drink from the chalice, for it is, he will repeat, “the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins” and he will add “do this in memory of me.” We are, in this moment and in his memory doing exactly what the Lord told us to do.

Let us ask today for the grace to grow in our consciousness of how great and wonderful the celebration of the Eucharist is for us: the Lord offering us eternal life and promising to raise us up on the last day! Take time to consider the just value of these words of the Gospel and to welcome the importance of the Eucharist for our life. The Eucharist, in this perspective is the sacrament of our salvation, the sacrament of our communion with God. It is the privileged moment during which the Lord, by giving us his body and blood concretely comes to dwell in us. We remain in him and him in us and he shares his life with us. It is important to ponder for a moment on this. In this moment, in the Eucharist, God is enacting the great mystery of faith, the mystery of our salvation, mystery of a God that came to dwell among and in us, of a God who comes to dwell in each one of us.

This is the admirable exchange we contemplated more than two weeks ago at Christmas, the exchange in which the Creator through the incarnation of the Son unites himself to his creature, communicating his life. For us God became bread and wine changing it into his body and blood and to live in us. What a wonderful mystery in which we contemplate the marvellous unfolding of the love of a God who gives himself to us.

*“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day”*. The words of the Lord also reveal with clarity and conviction the truth about the meaning of our existence as God’s creatures. In the light of the Christian faith, it is time we remember that we exist as a gift from God and that we are destined to eternal life.

From Jesus’ gift of his body and blood we have eternal life, we enter into communion with God already here on earth and, we will live forever as Jesus promises to raise us up on the last day. This is encouraging and consoling for the circumstances that gather us here today as, in faith, we believe that our brother Richard Cardinal Baawobr, whom we are entrusting to God, lives in God and that the Lord will raise him up on the last day. Though his death, everyone acknowledges, remains for us tragic. In faith and in God’s word our hearts find consolation.

The death of a loved one is often a source of sadness, but the one of Richard, Cardinal Richard, is heart-breaking because it is difficult for us to separate it from the succession many events. In May last year he was appointed Cardinal by Pope Francis. A little later he elected President of SECAM. We all welcomed both the appointment and the election as the beginning of very promising pilgrimages in Cardinal Richard's life of service to the Church. We were very excited to receive him in Rome with the different delegations that accompanied him for the consistory and we mobilised ourselves to give thanks to God for that, with celebration at the Generalate of the Missionaries of Africa in Rome though we did that in his absence while waiting to celebrate with him as he was in hospital. Here in Ghana, people were waiting for him to come back and continue his work. All of a sudden, everything we had been looking forward to came to a standstill with none of us really believing the sad news when it fell!

Since then, many of us have been trying to make sense of what has happened. We have been asking the Lord, how he could allow this. One conviction prevails: surely, the Lord's ways are not our ways (cf. Isaiah 55: 8-9). It is only in faith, in the word of God, that we have found consolation. Faith and the word of God do indeed bring us back to what we profoundly are, brothers and sisters of Christ, adopted sons and daughters destined for the fullness of life in God. The word reminds us that baptised with Christ into death our brother Cardinal Richard was born in the new life in Jesus. We know that this concretely prompted him to consecrate his life to the service of God as a priest and missionary, leaving not only his family but also his loved Ghana to go and preach God's word to the African World and he accompanied that with a life dedicated to the service of the other. Ghana and his family had in some way lost him already years ago when he left to consecrate his life to serve God as a priest and missionary, but you lost him to the Lord.

We cannot ignore the bitter feeling of losing a young and promising cardinal who had, together with you, people of God of Wa Diocese, a vision for the Diocese and who engaged in a number of projects. It surely pains to think of what he would have offered as Cardinal to the Diocese of Wa, to the African Church and indeed to the universal Church. We still give thanks to God for giving us a cardinal and a president for SECAM, not because of what he would have offered but because of what we already know he had offered to us and which he leaves us as an example of Christian life. He was a hardworking shepherd who was very attentive to the downcast. He had a positive attitude in life and did not complain nor blame anyone. Looking at Cardinal Richard's life, one can well count him among those who "Having become perfect in a short while, reached the fullness of a long career; for their souls were pleasing to the Lord", as the Book of Wisdom puts it. He was only 63! That is young! But as the saying in Moore goes : *Ka songo ka tat zaenge ye, Le bon mil n'arrive pas à l'aire de battage...son grain est consommé avant...* Good millet does not reach the threshing floor...its grain is consumed before...

Cardinal Richard ate the Lord's flesh and drunk his blood in his long life as a Christian and priest, It is our faith, our hope and our prayer that he has entered in the new life Jesus promised and that he lives with him forever. May we too live with him when our time comes.

Fr. Stanley Lubungo, M.Afr

