

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2010

REDEEM A KIDNAPPED PEOPLE!

No other table game in history has sold more sets than *Monopoly*. Curiously enough, the game was originally rejected because it took too long to play, involved complex rules, and made use of difficult concepts like mortgage and interest. But in 1935 Parker Brothers brought out the first game of *Monopoly* and the rest of the story is history, as they say. *Monopoly* owes its popularity to its appeal to adults and children alike and its focus on economic competition. It was the perfect game for a society built on principles of free enterprise and individual initiative. It was the perfect primer for introducing the young to such sophisticated concepts as handling money, buying property, paying taxes, creating monopolies and investing capital. *Monopoly* furnished the training wheels for life in the workaday world.

Everyone who has ever played the game can remember the chagrin of landing on the spot that says, *Go to jail. Go directly to jail. Do not pass GO. Do not collect \$200.* By the same token, everyone remembers the good feeling of drawing a *Get out of jail free* card. With that card, there was no cost for getting out of jail. But life seldom treats us this way, canceling our debts as if we bear no blame. We never get out of the jails we make for ourselves without paying some price. This is the logic of our present history. There is no jail worse than kidnapping.

ARMS SPEAK, LAWS ARE SILENT!

We all wish that through some miracle of grace this scarred and traumatized region might, in the words of Isaiah, beat its *swords into plowshares*, and *train for war no more* (Isaiah 2:4). But it isn't likely. Nigerian history is the story of conflict. It is a nation of ungovernability. Dates memorized for history classes are mostly dates of wars. History seems to merely shift from one battlefield to another, one crisis to another, from one geo-political zone to another. We are being plagued by the present spate of senseless kidnapping for a hair-raising ransom demand. Families are wounded to their very marrows.

WE NEED A SAVIOUR

Careless deaths are our lot. Disease and poverty reign in this age of plenty and of unbridled consumerism. Some people remain enslaved, exploited and stripped of their basic human rights; others are victims of fratricide, religious intolerance and discrimination. Security is gone awry. Daily experience passes a verdict of its non-existence. Mounting corruption continues to stunt development and progress in this country. These

electioneering days bombard us with a flurry of empty talks, vain promises and bewilder us with concomitant clandestine political crimes. How can we help those who are misled by the facile prophets of happiness, those who struggle with relationships and are incapable of accepting responsibility for their present and future, those who are trapped in the tunnel of loneliness and who often end up enslaved to alcohol or drugs and the complex vicissitudes emanating from joblessness? How can we not hear from our people a heart-rending cry for help? Today *a Saviour is born to the world*. He knows that we need him!

LOVE MAKES PEACE

Therefore, Christ did descend from heaven *for our salvation*, but what moved him to come down for our salvation was love, nothing else but love. Christmas is the supreme proof of God's *philanthropy*, as Scripture calls it (Titus 3:4), that is, of God's love for man. John too responds to the why of the Incarnation in this way: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever should believe in him would not die but have life everlasting* (John 3: 16).

Love makes peace. Lasting peace, not just a ceasefire. Love transforms hostilities, and converts their negative energies into life forces. The testimony of Christ's followers throughout history is that, because of the transforming power of his love, *Christ is our peace*. The full testimony of the Universal Church is even more amazing. Across two thousand and more years echoes the claim that Christ not only can make peace, but has made peace! He has done the work. It is finished. God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself. Reconciliation is there to be claimed. To be accepted. To be realized.

I express my hope that the way will be opened to a just and lasting peace, in our land and beloved *Abia State, God's Own State*. I place in the hands of the Divine Child of Bethlehem our desire for peace and harmony.

CONCLUSION

In truth, Christ comes to destroy only evil, only sin; everything else, all the rest, he elevates and perfects. Christ does not save us from our humanity, but through it; he does not save us from the world but came into the world, so that through him the world might be saved (cf. Jn 3: 17).

Dear brothers and sisters, wherever you may be, may this message of joy and hope reach your ears: God became man in Jesus Christ, he was born of the Virgin Mary and today he is reborn in the Church. He brings to all the love of the Father in heaven. Love to all, specially young people, who have lost the sense of authentic joy, and who seek it in vain where it is impossible to find: in the exasperated race of self-affirmation and success, in idleness, in the artificial

paradise of drugs, in the nefarious business of kidnapping and of other forms of alienation. And thus *Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI* said:

Jesus was born for everyone and just as Mary, in Bethlehem, offered him to the shepherds, so on this day the Church presents him to all humanity, so that each person and every human situation may come to know the power of God's saving grace, which alone can transform evil into good, which alone can change human hearts, making them oases of peace.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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