



AFRICA/NIGERIA - "We thank the Lord because during the Centenary of the arrival of Light in our lands, we enter the Year of Faith": the 100 years of the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) - "The missionaries arrived for the first time in this area about 100 years ago, so this is why we wanted to celebrate the arrival of the Light of Christ, the Light of Salvation, in our land," says to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. Antony John Valentine Obinna, Archbishop of Owerri, on the occasion of the conclusion of the celebrations for the Centenary of the evangelization of the homonymous Ecclesiastical Province, which will be presided by Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (see Fides 05/11/2012).

Mgr. Obinna explains to Fides: "The missionaries who initiated the evangelization of our area belonged to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost (Spiritan) from Alsace-Lorraine. Around the Second World War several Irish missionaries arrived. The missionaries sowed well, so much so that today the majority of the clergy is made up of local priests. The first local priest was ordained in 1937, followed by another in 1945. In this Centennial year 24 priests have been ordained including the religious of the province."

With regard to the current situation, the Archbishop stresses that "foreign missionaries in our Ecclesiastical Province are very few: we have some Indian priests of the Congregation of the Mother of God and the Sacred Heart, plus a dozen foreign women religious." Mgr. Obinna wants to emphasize the missionary vitality of the ecclesiastical Province: "Several of our priests are in mission abroad. This year we sent two priests to Burkina Faso. Not only the Archdiocese of Owerri, but also the other suffragan dioceses have missionaries abroad, Chad, Ghana, Congo, Gabon, Namibia, as well as in Europe and America. Tomorrow, November 7, we will have a meeting to share experiences with our missionary priests spread throughout the world."

With regards to the prospects for the future of the Church in Owerri, the Archbishop said: "We have accepted the Holy Father's invitation to the renewal of faith and for this we thank the Lord, because during the Centenary we celebrate the arrival of the Light in our lands, we enter the Year of Faith. We must therefore deepen Faith, which is almost a novelty for us, because we are still a young Church. At the same time we are aware that we live in a globalized world, and we also have the task of extending the Kingdom of Christ everywhere. Despite the secularism and atheism in the world today, we have this treasure of the Light of Christ to help us during our journey, struggling against the vices brought by secularism and ethical relativism," concluded Mgr. Obinna. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 06/11/2012)