

Communion and Solidarity between Europe and Africa in an Age of Human Mobility

SECAM-CCEE Seminar

Migration as a new point of Evangelization and solidarity.

“I was a stranger and you made me welcome” Mt 25:35.”

19th -23rd November 2008, Liverpool, United Kingdom.

Homily at Opening Evening Prayer

+John ONAIYEKAN, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria

1. We live in a world characterized by many international summits and high level meetings of world leaders. Our gathering here in Liverpool of Catholic Bishops from Europe and Africa may seem like one more of such meetings, full of words and little action. The topic of our concern, migration and human mobility, has been the subject of many international meetings. If we are ready to commit our meagre resources to yet another meeting, it is because we believe that the Church, in both Europe and Africa, has a valid and valuable contribution to make.
2. In the reading we have just listened to, St. James draws our attention to two different ways of looking at reality. On the one hand, there is the case of “someone who looks at his own features in a mirror, and once he has seen what he looks like, goes off and immediately forgets it.” On the other hand, we have the one “who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom, and keeps to it – not listening and forgetting, but putting it into practice”. It would appear that world leaders tend to analyse world issues like the man “who looks at his own features in a mirror”. Could this be why not enough concrete action follows from many high level discussions?
3. In our meeting, we intend to follow the other approach of looking steadily at “the perfect law of freedom” – and putting it into practice. That is why we open our programme with this worship session, at which we listen to the Word of God which directs human actions into the ways of peace and love. At the same time, we are awfully aware of the admonition of St. James that it is not enough to listen

to the word. We must do our best to put it into practice. To do this, we need the grace of God, which we fervently ask for in prayer.

4. For a variety of reasons, both positive and negative, religion has become a hot topic in our world of today, even at the highest level of the United Nations. The question raised by St. James as regards what is “pure and unspoil religion in the eyes of God our Father”, is both crucial and topical. He offers two criteria which are still valid today: to reach out to those in need, and to keep a clean mind in the midst of the moral turmoil of our days. For those of us who consider religion important not only for us but for the good of the entire humanity, we have to see this renewed interest in religion as an opportunity to re-establish its true image, as a “pure and unspoil religion in the eyes of God our Father”.