

Saint Josemaria in Nigeria

The adventure of organising a Mass in honour of Saint Josemaria in Abeokuta, Nigeria. This year, over 200 Masses were celebrated in cities and towns around Nigeria.

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My name is *Ella* and I live in Abeokuta, a city in southwest Nigeria. I moved here last year for my national service, which is a compulsory one-year posting for graduates of tertiary institutions.

Typically, on June 26 every year, I dig out my "borrom-box clothes". "Borrom-box" is common parlance for clothes worn for very special occasions. And June 26 is one of such occasions, the feast of St Josemaria Escriva. This year, over 200 Masses were celebrated in cities and towns around Nigeria.

Thankfully, Abeokuta was counted among these cities, which was my small adventure.

It started out when I called up a lady I had met to ask her opinion about having the Mass of St Josemaria in the cathedral. This lady had not heard about St. Josemaria before, so this gave me an opportunity to tell her more about him. After this, she wanted to know when Opus Dei would begin apostolic activities in Abeokuta. She gave me the contact number of the cathedral administrator so that I could make an appointment to tell him about the

Mass. I called and we agreed to meet the next day.

However, when I got to the cathedral office on the agreed day, the Administrator was not around. When I tried to call his cell phone, it was switched off. After waiting for an hour, I left the office very disappointed and started on my journey back home. I had to keep consoling myself that God wanted this Mass to be held more than I did, and that things would work out somehow. Suddenly my phone rang, and it was the cathedral administrator! He apologised profusely for keeping me waiting, and said we could plan everything over the phone. We did, and the Mass was fixed for the evening of June 28. I quickly made an e-flyer and sent this out to some friends and family members. They also shared the invitation with many others.

On the evening of the 28th, I took an ‘okada’ (a motorbike taxi). The name comes from an old airline called Okada. It is usually the fastest means of transportation when you want to beat traffic. Being the start of the rush-hour, it was a hair-raising trip. I was anxious as the okada driver was determined to overtake every car, truck and petrol tanker! But, to the glory of God (as we say), I got to my destination in one piece.

When I arrived the cathedral, my aunt whom I had invited was already waiting for me. Shortly after, some more people arrived. And then it happened. About 30 minutes to the start of the Mass, the weather changed and it started to rain. If you have experienced tropical rainstorms, you will appreciate that this was a worrying development. By now, the expression on my face was like that of a child who had lost her candy. The downpour continued

until it was time for the Mass. Despite it all, it was beautiful to see more people arriving, even under the rain. I was delighted when I saw the lady who had connected me with the cathedral administrator arriving for the Mass as well.

The Mass started and the homily was very moving. It turned out that the cathedral administrator was also the chief celebrant. He told us that he had attended the beatification of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, the first successor of St. Josemaria. He talked about the beatification, and about the happiness he saw shining on the faces of the people during the event. He said that it inspired him to find out more about St. Josemaria, because the founder must really have been a saint if the beatification of his successor was like this. He also talked about the teachings of St. Josemaria about holiness in everyday life, little things, prayer, especially

the Holy Mass as the foundation for holiness, and of work as a means for becoming holy.

After the Mass, as we distributed prayer cards of St Josemaria, the ambience was beautiful. People stood in small groups, talking about the Mass and greeting each other. In the end, the adventure of the missed meeting, the okada ride and downpour, all worked together for the good!

*Pictures of other Masses
celebrated in honour of St
Josemaria in Nigeria*
