

A Life that Shamed Death: Okechukwu Enyinna , 1975-2016

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By Tunji Olaopa

Most deaths speak only about death, its loss and pain. This is the norm, since our corporal frames is attuned to react to the definitive departure with despair. Yet there are some passing on that despite not diminishing the loss yet is suffused with luminous hope that it shames death. Okechukwu Clarence Enyinna's death on October 11, 2016, was a manifestation of the later.

Okechukwu, 41 years, was the first of six children born to Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus Enyinna of Ezinihitte Local Government Area of Mbaise in Imo State. An alumnus of Kings College Lagos and the prestigious University of Ibadan, Okechukwu graduated with an honour degree in Electrical Engineering in 1999. He obtained a Masters degree in Business Administration from the Lagos Business School in 2009, M.Phil in 2015 and was due to defend his PhD in IESE (Business School of the

University of Navarra, Spain) by the end of this year.

After graduating from the university, he worked at Socketworks Nigeria Limited, an information and computer technology company, rising to the post of Manager of Computer Software Engineering Services. He later worked as ICT Manager for Lagos Business School before being appointed to the post of Lecturer in Ethics at the Institute of Humanities of the Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos.

Yet it was not Okechukwu's impressive resume that molded the core of his existence. It was rather a long adventure with Love. Okey and his three siblings-Uzoma, Nnamdi and Chima- started taking part in activities in the Boys' Club in Helmbridge since their primary school days. At Helmbridge, the three brothers stood out with their

exemplary characters. Apart from excelling in academics, the three brothers also excelled in sports. Uzoma was a master dribbler in the football field. His dribbling runs along the right flank to mesmerize the defenders and score a goal earned him the sobriquet “Tigana”, the name of the then French national team player. In the field of play, Okey was a defensive midfielder. He knew how to gracefully stop the ball so that the aggressive strikers would not score a goal. After participating in Helmbridge activities for a long time, Okey decided to become a Numerary member of Opus Dei, a Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church, on 21st August 1990. Incidentally at that time he was a student of Kings College. He therefore lived 26 years of silent, hidden and exclusive dedication to his vocation. With his unfailing apostolic zeal, he brought many of his friends, professional

colleagues and acquaintances closer to God.

The dispatch rider rode in fury to spread pain and loss but must have been obviously disappointed on finding one who had prepared long for this event. Okey had suffered a degenerative illness since 1998. Earlier this year he was diagnosed with a terminal cancer. He received the cancer sad news with resignation to the Will of God. He never complained.

As I walked into his hospital room, the respirator blinking with multi-coloured lights, Okey looked up with that trademark smile and serenity of his. He was reading a journal article on his laptop, which had a picture of the Madonna displayed at the corner of the screen. It might seem ordinary but I doubt if I will have such frame of mind to continue studying in the midst of an impending journey to the

other side. Although his strength was ebbing away, rather than crave for pity, he assured me of his prayer for my dad (who is yet to recover from an auto crash a year after).

On another occasion, Okey was consoling his parents. He was conscious of the searing pain they were going through on account of his condition. Yet he told them not to worry, that everything will turn out fine, “it will be fantastic.” His was an optimism that not even a terminal illness could stifle.

Each of the few visits I made to his hospital room was like an existential peering into life. There is no doubt that Okey bore his illness with Christian equanimity. Throughout the period of his illness, he was always calm and serene even when it was obvious that he was experiencing pain and great discomfort. In his clutches he

patiently and happily trudged along the pathway without soliciting for assistance. Okechukwu's hospital bed was like a professorial rostrum that dispensed knowledge with such ineffable grace. Okey displayed a humility that was so natural that it can be easily missed and a radical courage for a world that that desires happiness without suffering. Till the very last, he was ever conscious of the need of others, and did not seek undue consolations.

With somewhat facial expression, he welcomed all who came to visit him at the hospital. His was a living faith, which drew strength from within, so much so that his bedside was above all, a cathedral of the redeeming power of the Cross. His last wish was to watch the "Passion of the Christ."

Okechukwu Clarence Enyinna took the sting off death by his exemplary life. He danced in cadence of the

ordinary to attain the extraordinary ecstasy of a deep union with God. Like His Master, whom he faithfully served, Okey showed that there can be a death that does not lead to despair. Okey's death speaks life, the Life that commenced at death, a Life that destroyed death!

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