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Son of Former Palace Mace Bearer Ordained Catholic Priest

Rev. Fr. Jude Idahosa
Egharevba, ordained priest of
the Prelature of Opus Dei
celebrated his First Solemn
Mass at his home town, Benin
City on Sunday February 15,
2004.

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The Oba of Benin, Omo N'oba Nedo
Uku Akpolokpolo sent several of his

high chiefs to represent him at the occasion. The venue was St. Paul's Catholic Church, Airport Road, Benin City. The occasion was the First Solemn Mass by Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Jude Idahosa Egharevba, the first son of Mr. Atkinson Egharevba, and the first priest of Opus Dei from the Benin Kingdom. Concelebrating with him at the solemn ceremony were eight other priests, led by Very Reverend Monsignor Patrick Usembor, the Vicar General I of the Benin Diocese and Very Revd Msgr Richard H. Ofere, Vicar General II and the parish priest of St. Paul's Catholic Church, Benin. Other priests present were Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Theophillus Uwaifo, former Catholic Chaplain of the University of Benin, Rev. Fr. Idahosa Amadasun and Fr. Andrew Ogbembe, the assistant parish priest of St. Paul's. Three priests of the Opus Dei Prelature were also present. They were: Rev. Fr. Boniface Okafor, who preached

the homily at the Mass, Rev. Fr. Simon Ugwu and Rev. Fr. Joseph Guzman.

Royalty made its presence quite felt that day with several Bini High Chiefs in attendance, fully clothed in their traditional regalia. At the head of the entourage representing the Oba of Benin was Prof. Chief Emmanuel Emovon, the Obayabona of Bini Kingdom, former Minister of Science and Technology and one-time Vice-Chancellor of the University of Jos. He was accompanied by his wife, Prof. (Mrs.) Emovon, who is a daughter of Oba Akenzua II, and thus a sister of the present Oba. Other high chiefs were Chief J. E. Ogieva, the Obaguehidase of Benin, Chief S. I. Aiguobarveghian, the Edobayokhae of Benin, Chief. S. Aigbedion, the Obayanbon of Benin and Chief M. Egbe, the Osezeguoba of Benin.

One may be wondering why the high turnout of Benin Chiefs at the first Mass of a Catholic priest...It is all due to the father of the new priest. Mr. Atkinson Egharevba grew up in the palace when Oba Akenzua II was reigning and was a scepter (or mace) bearer of the Oba. He later worked as a civil servant for many years, and when the present Oba of Benin, Oba Erediawa was installed, he called Mr. Atkinson Egbarevba to work with him in the Oba's palace, where he is to date. And so, His Royal Highness showed with such representation how dear the occasion was to him.

Born on October 31, 1965, Fr. Jude is the third of seven children, with two elder sisters and four younger brothers, to Mr. Atkinson and Mrs. Janet Egharevba. Although born into a family of traditional Edo religion, Rev. Fr. Jude felt attracted to the Catholic faith from when he was very young. Following the example of his

elder sisters who attended a Catholic primary school, he soon began to receive instructions on the faith and he was baptized a Catholic on the 30th of August 1975.

At the end of his secondary education at the Baptist High School, Benin City, Jude Egharevba gained admission to study Agriculture at the University of Benin in 1984. During his studies at the University, he was a University of Benin Scholar. In 1989, while in the final year of his university studies, he got to know about Opus Dei through some friends who invited him to attend a monthly recollection for professional men preached in Benin by a visiting Opus Dei priest from Ibadan. The Prelature of Opus Dei is a worldwide Catholic Institution that is made up of men and women of all professionals. Opus Dei was founded by St. Josemaria Escriva and it strives to promote the universal call to holiness in ordinary

life. It teaches how one can attain holiness through faithfully carrying out his or her duties. The founder of Opus Dei was canonized a saint by Pope John Paul II at an impressive ceremony attended by many Nigerians in Rome on October 6, 2002.

The discovery of Opus Dei opened up to Fr. Jude new perspectives and challenges. He was particularly attracted by the personality of St. Josemaria and the doctrine of the sanctification of work, of the possibility of becoming a saint right in the middle of the world through the sanctification of one's ordinary duties.

During his one year NYSC in Kanu Sate, 1990-1991, Fr. Jude took time to pray and reflect on the possibility of dedicating himself to God in Opus Dei in apostolic celibacy, without abandoning his professional work.

On the 9th of June 1991, he asked to be admitted as a numerary member of Opus Dei. From then on he started his studies in Philosophy and Theology without ceasing to exercise his profession just like his other professional colleagues.

Giving the biography of the new priest at the homily, Fr. Boniface Okafor, another priest of Opus Dei, reminded the over 1000 people present that Fr. Jude has a B.Sc degree in Agriculture from the University of Benin, as well as a Master's degree from the University of Ibadan in Animal Science. He then worked for many years in Lagos as a teacher and educational administrator.

Fr. Jude Egharevba was ordained in September 2002 by the Bishop Prelate of Opus Dei, Javier Echevarria in Rome where he had just completed a doctorate in

Dogmatic Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

The occasion of the First Solemn Mass of Fr. Jude Egharevba was a good time for everyone and himself to reflect on the exemplary upbringing given to him by his parents. Commenting on this, Fr. Jude said: “I am grateful to all that have contributed in various ways and manners to my reaching the priesthood, which is a completely unmerited gift. No one can take on himself the honor on the priesthood because it is Jesus Christ who calls. I wish to thank in the first place my parents for the gift of life, education and good example. St. Josemaria used to say that we owe 80% of our vocation to our parents. Of this I am convinced. I am also grateful to all other members of my family, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, etc, who have had a positive influence on my development.” He also expressed his

gratitude to the Oba of Benin, the Archbishop of Benin Diocese, Most. Rev. Dr. Patrick Ekpu and his Vicars, and to all those who have helped him be what he is today. Fr. Jude has special words of thanks for St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei, “whose heroic fidelity to the Will of God made Opus Dei a reality”. And for the Bishop Prelate of Opus Dei, Fr. Jude said: “I am grateful to the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarria who called me to the priesthood and ordained me, for all his care and attention during my preparation for the priesthood”.

Speaking further about the new grace he has just received, Fr. Jude continued: “ The apostolic work of Opus Dei is done in close collaboration between the priests and lay faithful. Therefore with the expansion of the apostolic activities of Opus Dei, priests are very much needed to give pastoral attention to

the faithful of the Prelature and others who attend its formative activities. I think that with a new priest available, it opens the possibility of making the formative activities of Opus Dei reach other places and people who want to benefit from it". The new priest ended by asking everyone to pray for "the priests of the Church, so that they may be very faithful in their service of God and all souls and that they may find continual joy and peace in their ministry".

Not only the Church and Palace were represented at the occasion. Present also were many people from the academia, notable among which was Professor V. J. Ikhatua, Dean of the Post Graduate School, University of Benin. Prof. Ikhatua, an agriculturist was the lecturer and supervisor of Fr. Jude while at Uniben. Dr. Azevibiye, of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Benin was

also present and so also was Dr. Oyegun, former governor of Edo State. Other dignitaries include Professor Obiaya, eminent physician, Chief J. Okwudiafor, former Permanent Secretary old Mid-West Region, Chief. Dr. Aletor of the prestigious Uloba hospital Benin and Hon. Benjamin Erhahon former local government councilor in Edo State. Dignitaries came from far and near: Lagos, Nsukka, Enugu, Warri, Asaba, etc.

The Guardian, Lagos, NIGERIA.
by Eugene Agboifo Ohu

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