

The Kings Receive the King

Damian, Ugochukwu and Nelson helped twelve students of Kings College to prepare for First Holy Communion during many Sundays. They wanted to take this step forward before graduating from secondary school. The effort was worthwhile and the day finally arrived.

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It has been ages since the last First Holy Communion was held for the

Kings College boys. My friends Damian and Ugochukwu, who are *Kings College Old Boys*, and I, usually go to the school on Sundays to give the boys catechism classes and classes on virtue. The boys had been preparing for their First Holy Communion for a long time, attending classes, writing tests and a final examination. This sacrament was well overdue for all of them, who were in their final or penultimate year of secondary school. Luckily, we were able to arrange for the First Holy Communion to take place in the chapel of *Whitesands School*. It was scheduled for Thursday, 19th of October, by 11:05 a.m. The boys were really excited to hear the news. It was a golden opportunity for them to receive this Sacrament before embarking on new uncharted territories of life, such as life in the university. Twelve of the boys were

going to receive their First Holy Communion.

Preparations for the big day began immediately. We sent out messages to the parents of the boys communicating the date, time and venue for the event, and also other important information. Things were falling into place seamlessly till we hit a roadblock. Students who are boarders need an *exeat* to leave the school premises. Our request for an *exeat* for the students to leave school for the event was denied by the Principal. We had to think of other solutions to make the event work. After much deliberation, we resolved that each parent would have to go to the school, obtain an *exeat* for their son and transport him to the venue and back. Many parents lived far from the school, some in other states. Going to school was difficult. The entire situation became complicated so fast, and we didn't have time on

our side. All we had was our hope and prayer. Down to the day of the big event, there were still a lot of uncertainties regarding the attendance of most of the boys. However, the denial of the *exeat* by the principal turned out to be a blessing, as it meant that more parents would be present at their children's First Holy Communion if everything went according to plan.

The big day finally arrived, still filled with uncertainties. Parents of the boys marched to the school and demanded an *exeat* at the vice principal's office, which was again denied. Providentially, the Catholic coordinator of the school –Mr. Sam–, who lives on the senior campus but works on the junior campus, was ill and did not go to work on time that day. The parents requested his intervention, and so Mr. Sam spoke on their behalf to the to the vice principal, finally securing the much-

anticipated *exeat*, allowing the boys to leave school for the ceremony.

Hurray! Ugochukwu had just arrived at the school when the issue was solved. He organized the parents and the boys and ordered several *Uber* cabs to the venue. I was already at *Whitesands School* to welcome the boys. Upon their arrival, they marveled at the beauty and serenity of the school. I ushered them up to the chapel. They sat at the last row of the chapel closest to the confessional in preparation for their first confessions. As they sat on the pew waiting for the priest to begin hearing confessions, you could see the nervousness in their eyes. The priest arrived, and they went in one by one, each coming out more radiant than he went in. After the last person was done with his confession, it was a beautiful scene to see their parents also go for confession one by one.

The school bell rang. It was now time for the Mass. The boys looked the most serious I had ever seen them.

At the start of the Mass, the priest called out the names of the twelve boys, pausing for five seconds after each name. It felt like Judgment Day for the boys and Graduation Day for their parents. During the homily, the priest spoke beautiful words about the Eucharist and urged the boys to allow it to nourish their souls. After the homily, the big moment was getting closer and closer. The centurion's prayer was said, and it was finally time for the reception of the Eucharist. With the angelic choir of Whitesands singing the *Anima Christi* hymn, the kings dressed in their white shirts and trousers with a white and blue striped tie and a navy-blue blazer got up, knelt on the rail and gracefully, the kings received the King.

The joy that filled the hearts of the parents was palpable. Lots of pictures were taken. Just before the final blessing, the chaplain asked that the kings be given a round of applause. The chapel was filled with applause from the parents and *Whitesands* students who attended the Mass. The final blessings were said, and parents hugged and congratulated the kings. More pictures were taken to immortalize the event. It was such a beautiful moment to behold.

After all the pictures, the vice principal of *Whitesands* hosted all of us for lunch at the school cafeteria, and we were most grateful. After the meals, my friends and I chatted with the parents. A parent of one of the new communicants called me on phone to thank me for preparing her son and expressed her surprise hearing he had received his First Holy Communion. She explained that

after her marriage, she didn't take her Catholic faith seriously anymore and was perplexed as to how her son got this far. She concluded that her son's *wandering in Rome* had provided new impetus for her. While on the call, her mother (the boy's grandmother) jumped into the call to pray for me and thank me. After all the chatting, it was now time to go back to school. The logistics were arranged, and the boys were back to school.

The beautiful day was over. It was a scintillating and colourful experience for the kings. One that would undoubtedly remain indelible in their minds.

Nelson Nzewi

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