I Would Like to be Like that Man

Kuha Indyer
was born on the 13th day of October 1971 in a small village called Akerigba in Benue State, Nigeria. In those days the expatriate Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers (Spiritans) were evangelizing my people. In 1975, when I was four years old, my father took me on his shoulders to the Catholic primary school in the village to watch a film shown by one of the Spiritans which I believe must have been *Jesus of Nazareth*. Upon spotting a white man wearing an immaculate cassock and cincture tied round his waist, I told my father, “I would like to be like that man when I grow up”. All my desire was to become a Catholic priest.

As a child I would gather the children of my age to say a mock mass, where I acted as the priest while my peers formed the congregation and one served as a catechist. The idea of becoming a priest pushed me to start primary school at an early age. Any time I saw my relations going to school in the morning I asked them to take me along. But they would always turn down the request for fear that I would cry of hunger at school. It so happened that one day as they were going to school, unknown to them I followed behind. The school was located less than half a kilometre from our village. When I reached the school premises and the headmaster spotted me, he asked what I wanted to do and I responded, “I wanted to go to school”. Inspired by my request, he asked one of the pupils to take me to class one. That was the beginning of my western education. This was in the year 1976, when I was five years old.

After primary school I rested for a year before going to the secondary school. Even in the secondary school, my desire to become a priest grew from strength to strength. In those days I used to wear the brown scapular of Our Lady and some of my mates who had known my intention to become a priest used to tease me a lot. This was due to the fact that I also loved social activities. They would say I wanted to become a priest but I was always attending discos. My response to them would be “a priest is not supposed to be an anti-social person”. One day I knelt down and prayed to God to let me know if he really wanted me to serve him as a priest. I asked for a particular sign, that he should let me have the gift of dreams.

I also faced strong opposition from my mother. My father would tell me that I should do whatever I wanted to do with my life, provided that it was not something that would bring shame to the family name. My mother would tell me that if I became a priest, I would not give birth to children. Some men reached marriageable age and died, so as I was doing something that would bring glory to God’s name, I did not worry if I had no biological child. Eventually she gave up and gave me her blessing to go into the seminary.

After she had given me her blessing, an uncle came along to test me by giving me a
scholarship to study in the then Soviet union. However, I turned down the offer because my only desire was to serve God in the Catholic priesthood.

Thus, in the year 1989, I was admitted into the Holy Ghost Congregation for priestly training under the then West African Foundation. Since then, I have studied in Nigeria and Ghana and had my prefecting year in the Gambia under the supervision of the former Secretary General of the Congregation, now the Bishop of the Gambia, Most Rev. Bob Ellison, CSSp.

Along the way I started having doubts whether I was called to the life because of some sad experiences I had. These doubts were not exposed, I only discussed them with a student confrere. Eventually, I made up my mind to become a priest and be a different person. It was then that I was put on probation for a year. When the letter of my probation was given to me, I told myself that God was also testing me and I said, “God’s time is the best”. I was not bitter about the experience. I was asked to do the probation year at Our Lady, Queen of Africa Parish, Bolgatanga, in Ghana. While I served in the parish as a deacon, the bishop of the diocese became interested in my missionary zeal and asked that I be sent to work in his diocese in the communication department after my ordination.

**Ordination and First Appointment**

My ordination to the priesthood was on July 15, 2000. After the ordination, I was posted to Ghana, to the same parish where I had done my year of probation. During my stay in the parish, I worked as the youth chaplain and initiated a needy child educational fund to take care of youth who had no one to take care of their education. I was also appointed editor of the diocesan newsletter, *The Diocesan Link*.

I worked in Ghana until the year 2004, when the religious authorities there transferred me to Nigeria. When I came to my home region, Makurdi, I discovered a challenge which had to be faced and which some of my confreres were not ready to face. As missionaries, we were only servicing existing institutions and not making new paths. The expatriate Spiritans had opened up schools, hospitals, parishes, but handed them over to the diocese, and we the indigenous Spiritans were just working in these parishes. I made a request to the then religious authorities that they should allow me to face the challenge of making a new path. That was the beginning of the project ‘Spiritans In Integral Development’ (SIID), which is aimed at the holistic development of the human person. The motto of SIID is ‘Called to Build a Better World’.

**Building a better world**

SIID set up a multi-media centre which is aimed at spreading the good news through the modern means of communications. With the help of the European Union of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers we were able to buy a video camera and a printer for this purpose. We have three staff at the multi-media centre, a computerist, a sales person and a cameraman.

We have discovered that if we are to build a better world, education is the key, so we decided to build a secondary school in an area that is academically deprived. The school is called Holy Ghost College, a boys’ boarding school.

Holy Ghost College is meant to provide quality education to its students under the influence of the Catholic Church. We have not put all the basic facilities in place, but we believe in God’s providence. So far we have roofed a four-room classroom block, completed the principal house, which is named after Blessed Daniel Brottier, CSSp who had great love for the youth and believed in divine providence. We are constructing a dormitory that is meant to accommodate about a 100 boys. The dormitory also has an apartment for a staff to live in.

Since the school project is just about to take off, we face a lot of challenges: I use a bush lamp in the house; for my water needs I have to go to the nearby stream. I have a sense how the early missionaries felt when they came to evangelize Africa, when I sleep alone in the bush and the only things I can hear there are sounds of birds. I am contented by the fact that the missionary life has given me the opportunity to serve the people, and even without the basic necessities of life, I feel happy because I am addressing the needs of my immediate community.

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