



*2024 New Year Message of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke,
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**“THOSE WHO HOPE IN THE LORD ... WILL SOAR ON WINGS LIKE AN
EAGLE... THEY WILL NOT GROW WEARY” (Is 40:31)**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is a New Year! We thank God for leading us into 2024. Every day is like any other, distinguished only by the weather conditions: rainy day, sunny day, cold day, etc. Human beings, however, load some days with meaning more than other days. They place markers, build up calendars to commemorate different events. That is why in 2024, we are commemorating the fact that it has been roughly, two thousand and twenty four years after the birth of Jesus Christ. We thank God for the gift of His Only Begotten Son, by whose birth, as Christians, we mark the year. We commend ourselves, our loved ones, and the whole human community into the loving hands of God. For those who did not make it into the New Year 2024, we pray for eternal repose. For those who will be called back to the Lord in the Year just beginning, we pray for the grace of a happy death.

As we set out on a journey tracing the path of the New Year, I wish to recommend for our guidance the deep truth about God and our relationship with God as articulated by the Prophet Isaiah. This was a prophecy addressed to the Israelites during their exile in Babylon. They felt helpless, forgotten by God and guilty that they brought the calamity of being taken into exile unto themselves by their unfaithful to the covenant. In this situation, the prophetic word was announced: “To whom can you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look: he who created these things.” (Is 40:25-26). In other words, God who created and keeps everything in its proper place can still intervene in the situation of the Israelites and change it for the better. But the Israelites wondered if God would still care about them after their repeated unfaithfulness? The answer to this came as a rebuke: “How can you say, ... ‘my way is hidden from God, my rights are ignored by my God?’” (Is 40:27). Of course, God cares for His people, however much they have erred. God does not grow tired or weary. God’s

understanding is beyond our comprehension. God forgives. He supports the weary and strengthens the powerless in a way that beats our imagination.

To the many Nigerians who, like the Israelites feel exiled and in dire straits, and who with the Psalmist, have lifted their eyes and are asking from where their help shall come (Ps 121:1-2), the answer is that our help shall come from the Lord who made heaven and earth. The Lord will not, however, rain down manna as in the desert (Ex 16:1-36) because the Lord has said that by the labour of our hands and of our brains, we shall eat (Ps. 128:2). Manna ceased on the day the Israelites harvested what they planted in the land of Canaan (Josh 5:12). Now God multiplies the strength of those who work hard, who do good and who do the needful.

The key to the activation of the strength from God is HOPE: “Those who hope in the Lord will find their strength renewed; they will soar like an eagle, though they run they will not get weary, though they walk they will never tire” (Is 40:31). This is a promise of strength and renewal beyond human capacity.

Hope is built on trust and confidence in God’s love, nearness, and assistance despite one’s present circumstance and the duration of one’s sojourn in the valley of darkness. St Paul assures us that, **for Christians, hope never disappoints** (Rom 5:5). Why? Because the love of God which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, has been manifested in Christ’s death for us, even while we were sinners. This hope that springs from faith in God who loved us first (1 Jn 4:19), energizes us to persevere through hardship and develop tested character that stays focused on what is true, honorable, upright, good, and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8) despite challenges, oppositions, and distractions.

As we set out on our journey, may our hope in God renew our strength and make us soar like eagles as we face both the foreseen and unforeseen events and processes that will hit us on the roller coaster journey through 2024. May our hope guarantee us the supply of energy to remain steadfast in doing good, since “only righteousness exalts a nation” (Prov. 14:34) and it is the little seeds of goodness and righteousness sown in tears that the Lord of history will transform into abundant harvest of goodness and joy for all.

Happy New Year!

His Eminence Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke

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