

MY TRIP HOME ~ Part 1

By Fr. Mike

Have you ever returned to your home town, where you were born, and where your family has existed for about four generations, for vacation? Was it really a vacation, or work? This is the question I have concerning my recent trip. It was a trip to remember. The original purpose of the trip was for the following:

- To attend and preside over the funeral of my brother-in-law.
- To attend the traditional wedding of the sister of my godson.
- To attend the funeral of Dr. Agu (who died in Harbor City near San Pedro in California).
- To visit my ailing uncle.

When I arrived, the agenda quickly changed from four items to nine. It now included the following:

- To visit and give rice to the poor.
- To attend the funeral of the mother of a family friend from Inglewood, California.
- To attend the wedding of the sister of a priest friend.
- To officiate at the wedding of my cousin.
- To arrange for the funeral of my uncle.

I had about three weeks to finish these tasks. The locations of some of these events were far from each other. It is about an eight to ten hour's drive from one location to the other. None of the deaths were as a result of Covid-19.

With regard to Covid-19, the two countries, the U.S and Nigeria handle it differently. The Nigerian government requires that you take a Covid-19 test 72 hours prior to arrival to Nigeria. After taking the test, the traveler has to email the result to the Nigerian embassy. If the result is negative, the embassy will issue a travel permit that allows you to board an airplane. On arrival at the Nigerian airport, the first station is the Covid-19 station. You need to show the travel permit as well as your Covid test result. They take your temperature. If everything is alright at this station, then you proceed to Immigration, and later to Customs. I was pleasantly surprised by their seriousness. However, once inside the country it was a different story. As in many countries, some have taken it seriously, and others have not.

My first assignment was to preach at the funeral of my brother-in-law. His death did not come as a surprise because he had been sick for more than a year or two, and he was elderly. He was the traditional ruler of that part of the town. Many dignitaries attended the funeral. For our family, it was two day event, the 29th and 30th of December.

Prior to my arrival, I had inquired about the impact of Covid-19 on the economic life of the ordinary citizens. It was not good. In Nigeria, I changed all the generous Christmas gifts I received from the Parishioners of Assumption into the local currency, and bought 21 bags of 25kg (about 55lbs) of white rice, onions, and other condiments. This was to be given to families in need. The criteria we used to identify beneficiaries was as follows:

- They must be widow or widower with little children or with unemployed adult children, and are barely getting by.
- Couples with children who are not meaningfully employed.

- Single ladies with no meaningful employment or source of income, therefore very vulnerable.

In this part of the world, people live off the land and conduct little businesses. It is by the grace of God that they make it every day. The plan was to give these bags of rice to the families on December 31st so that they could celebrate the New Year with it. I collected a list from my brother and the local Catechist.

~Part 2-Food Distribution