

**Homily for the National Jubilee Pilgrimage**  
**“Hope Does Not Disappoint, Peace is the Answer.”**  
**Delivered by Most Rev. Dr. Bob John H. Koroma, Bishop of Makeni Diocese.**

Your Excellencies, my Brother Bishops in the Lord's Vineyard; Esteemed Government Officials, Members of Parliament and our Traditional Leaders; My dear Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Religious, Seminarians and Novices; Rev. Pastors and Christians of other denominations; Our Muslim Brothers and Sisters and Adherents of other Faith Expressions; our Partners in the service of the common good; Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Faithful Pilgrims from every corner of our beloved nation: *Grace and peace to you all, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of our Hope and the foundation of our Peace!*

It is with a heart overflowing with spiritual joy that I welcome you to this sacred gathering in the Diocese of Makeni. We are a mosaic of God's people, a vibrant tapestry woven from the four Dioceses of Freetown, Bo, Kenema, and Makeni. Your presence here, after journeys long and arduous, is a powerful testament not just to your personal faith, but to our collective identity as one family, one Body of Christ. We have come here as living stones, and together, we are building a spiritual house for the Lord. It is my hope, therefore, that this spiritual exercise today would ignite in each of us reflection, genuine reorientation and transformation.

**Purpose of the Jubilee and Pilgrimage: A Collective Journey of the Soul**

We are gathered for a purpose that transcends a mere ceremony. We have come as *Missionary Disciples* and *Pilgrims of Hope*, in response to Pope Francis' invitation, declaring 2025 as a Jubilee Year of Hope. This is against the backdrop that we all aspire for a better future; we desire a happy and fulfilled life; we yearn to live in dignity, peace and harmony. By proclaiming this Jubilee, Pope Francis calls the entire Church to a spiritual renaissance - a time to forgive debts of injury, to restore our fractured relationships with God, with one another and the environment, and to proclaim a liberty from the sins and structures that enslave us. For Christians today, this is not about reclaiming physical property, but about reclaiming our spiritual inheritance as God's children.

A pilgrimage is a profound metaphor for the Christian life itself. It is a deliberate movement away from the familiar comforts of our routines and biases, and a journey towards a holy encounter. The blisters on our feet are meant to mirror the purging of our souls. The shared journey, the prayers recited or sung in unison, the ongoing celebration of the Mass - all of this is designed to reshape us. We have not come merely to mark a date on a calendar, but to have our hearts recalibrated by grace, to be reignited with a divine virtue that our nation so desperately needs: the virtue of Hope, which finds its ultimate expression in Peace.

**“Hope Does Not Disappoint, Peace is the Answer”**: These twin pillars of our celebration today, taken as our theme, are a divine promise and a human imperative. *“Hope does not disappoint,”* as St. Paul assures us, *“because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”* (Romans 5:5). This is the unshakeable foundation. And from this foundation flows the answer to the world's turmoil: *“Peace is the answer.”*

This is not a simplistic slogan. It is a profound theological reality. True, lasting peace - the *Pax Christi* - is not merely the absence of war. It is the tranquility of order, the fruit of justice, and the blossoming of hope. When hope withers, conflict blooms. But when our hope is anchored in God, we become artisans of peace, for we know that violence and division are never the final answer. The hope that does not disappoint is the very engine that drives us to build a peaceful society.

**What Christian Hope Is: The Anchor in the Storm**: From Sacred Scriptures to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, hope is defined with precision and power. It is the theological virtue by which we desire

eternal life in Heaven as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. CCC 1817). This hope is not a fleeting illusion; it is a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19), holding us fast in the storms of life. Yes, this hope is rooted in trust in God’s faithfulness, a God who cannot deceive nor be deceived.

**What Hope Is Not: Dispelling the Illusions:** But we must be vigilant, my dear people, in distinguishing this robust, theological virtue from its cheap imitations.

- We must understand that hope is *not* a passive daydream where we sit back, fold our arms and wait for things to happen, or a spiritual escapism where we wait for God to act while we remain spectators. Rather, it is an active virtue which demands disciplined effort and resourcefulness
- Next, we must also appreciate that hope is *not* a pious cover for cowardice in the face of injustice and evil, a way of saying “*God will handle it*” to avoid our own responsibility.
- Furthermore, hope is *not* a naive optimism or a kind of tranquillizer which refuses to see the painful realities of our societal ills. Rather, it gives us the fortitude we need to confront or endure them.

So, to confuse hope with passivity is to betray the Gospel. The hope of the Cross was active; it was the hope that endured suffering for the joy set before it. Our hope must equally spur us into action, inspiring us to labor in the fields of the Lord for a better world and a decent future.

### **Pilgrims of Hope & How We Frustrate It: The Journey and the Roadblocks**

So, the two questions that come to mind now are: how do we become true “Pilgrims of Hope” and how do we, tragically, frustrate this hope?

We become true pilgrims of hope by understanding that our entire life is a journey toward the New Jerusalem, and every step must be taken in trust and in love. We are pilgrims, not tourists. Tourists seek comfort; pilgrims seek transformation. On the other hand, we, tragically, frustrate this hope by allowing the salt of our faith to become contaminated with the world’s cynicism, losing its preserving power. We frustrate hope when we hide our light under the basket of tribalism, political partisanship, or the fear of speaking truth to power.

### **Salt, Light, and an Unbreakable Promise**

This brings us to the heart of our identity and mission, as declared by our Lord Himself: “*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:13-14).

In the ancient world, salt was essential for *preservation* - preventing decay - and also for *flavor* - giving taste and joy. As *salt*, we, Christians, are called to give an antiseptic influence to the world, to be a moral preservative in a society prone to the decay of injustice and moral relativism. Then we are to give flavor – by dispensing dignity, meaning, and joy to a world that often finds life gloomy and miserable.

Light, by its nature, *dispels darkness* and *provides illumination, guidance and direction*. As *light*, we are not the source, but reflectors of the true Light, Jesus Christ. We are called to illuminate the path of integrity, expose the hidden works of the diabolical forces of evil, and guide our nation toward the dawn of a new day. This entire mission is guaranteed by the promise of our second reading: our hope will not, *cannot* disappoint, because its source is nothing less than the very love of God, poured into our hearts.

**The Sierra Leone Context: Where Salt Must Preserve and Light Must Shine** Fellow Pilgrims, let us now bring this salty, illuminating hope to the specific crossroads of our beloved nation, Sierra Leone.

1. *Hope for Our Disillusioned Youth Hooked on Drugs:* To a youthful population seeking escape in the false paradise of hard drugs, notably *kush*, we must collectively be the hope that *preserves*. Our duty is not just condemnation but active preservation. We must devise ways to flavour the lives of our young people with real alternatives: with quality education, with viable skills training, with pastoral care that tirelessly reaffirms their God-given dignity. The Church must be a *field hospital*, as Pope Francis would say, binding these wounded hearts with the balm of mercy and the tangible hope of a future. *Peace is the*

*answer* here, for young people at peace with themselves and their future would have no need for the false peace of narcotics.

2. *Hope in the Midst of Hardship and multi-dimensional Poverty*: To our people weighed down by dehumanizing poverty, we must be a hope that *flavors*. This means our NGO's, Caritas agencies, development partners and the government must be more innovative, focusing not only on immediate relief but on sustainable empowerment - teaching how to fish, not just giving fish. It also means being a prophetic light, exposing the structural sins and unjust systems that perpetuate cyclic poverty. *Peace is the answer* because there can be no true peace where economic injustice creates a chasm between the few who have too much and the vast majority who have too little.
3. *The Scandal of Politics for Self-Enrichment* We must then shine a glaring, unflinching light on the political mindset that sees public office as a shortcut or fast lane to personal wealth, entitlement, brute power, and a platform to divide our people along tribal and regional lines, rather than advancing the collective wellbeing of all Sierra Leoneans. This is a direct, blasphemous contradiction of hope! It steals from our people the hope for good governance, for justice, for the common good. A leader who sows tribalism is an enemy of peace and an arsonist of national unity. *Peace is the answer* that demands integrity, servant leadership, the rule of law and a politics that unites rather than divides. Yes, we should consider politics as a space where leadership meets responsibility and where the needs of the people dictate the direction of governance. This is the recipe for meaningful peace and stability.
4. *Hope in the Safeguarding of Our Common Home*: Our reckless attitude towards the environment as evidenced in the poor waste management now choking drains in some towns, the dumping of rubbish along our street corners, the indiscriminate deforestation and the unchecked mining disfiguring our land - is a sin against hope for future generations. It's a statement of despair that "We care less about those who come after us." This is not the mindset of a Pilgrim of Hope, who is called by God to 'cultivate and preserve' the earth (Genesis 2:15). *Peace is the answer* that calls for ecological conversion, for living in harmony with God's creation, ensuring a peaceful and sustainable home for our children now and those yet unborn.
5. *In reference to the monster called tribalism or ethnocentrism*, let me make this distinction with crystal clarity. That to love and take pride in one's tribe, language, and cultural heritage is a God-given gift to be celebrated. In fact, every ethnic group contributes something unique, beautiful and vital to our shared national identity. But *tribalism* - the arrogant and misguided belief that one's tribe is superior to others, and therefore, has the right to dominate, marginalize, or demonize others - is a venomous sin. It is a direct denial of our baptism, which makes us one in Christ: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:28). Tribalism is a cancer that destroys the hope for a unified nation. It corrodes unity, breeds mediocrity and corrupt politicians use it as a shield against accountability. *Peace is the answer* that embraces our diversity as strength, not as weakness – a diversity that spices our national life.

### **A Call to Action for a Hopeful and Peaceful Nation**

Therefore, for the hope that does not disappoint to flourish, and for peace to be our tangible answer, we must commit to the following:

- *First, the need for National Cohesion*: We must consciously build a nation where everyone in position of authority must learn the art of managing diversity; and every citizen, from Kambia to Kailahun, Bumpah to Bomeh, feels a sense of belonging, ownership, and equal opportunity in this country. Political defeat or electoral failure should not be tantamount to being treated as a second-class citizen of Sierra Leone. Together, let's wipe out stereotypes in our communities, parishes and work-places. Parents, teach your children that their tribe does not make them superior or inferior to anyone else. Schools, emphasize national values alongside cultural appreciation. Journalists, report objectively and responsibly, with an

understanding that words can either heal or harm. Similarly, religious leaders of every creed or denomination, use the pulpit to promote unity, tolerance and peace, not petty and parochial interests.

- *Second, Employment for the Youth:* We must channel our national resources, our ingenuity, and our international partnerships towards creating meaningful opportunities for our young people. A jobless youth is a powder keg of hopelessness. Engaging them constructively is an act of peace-building.
- *Third, the need for a Responsible and Politically Intelligent Electorate:* The power to sanctify our political landscape lies profoundly with *you*, the citizens. You hold a sacred, non-transferable responsibility. Do not sell your birthright for a pot of stew! Do not commercialize your vote for mere palliatives or handouts. To do so, is to mortgage your children's future for something transient. When the opportunity arises, vote on the basis of conscience, competence, and character; not on the basis of ethnicity or region. As Pope St. Paul VI taught, "*Politics is a demanding manner of living the Christian commitment to the service of others.*" Demand that spirit of service from your leaders. *Peace is the answer* that is chosen at the ballot box when citizens vote wisely, and hold leaders accountable.
- *Fourth, the need for Religious Tolerance:* Our nation's beautiful history of harmony between Muslims and Christians is a beacon of hope in a world fractured by religious extremism, especially in our subregion. Thanks to the remarkable work of the Interreligious Council in this country. We must hold on to, and jealously protect this sacred legacy. Let us see people of other faith expressions as brothers and sisters, not as disposables, but as indispensable partners in building a just and peaceful Sierra Leone. Our unity is a testament that *peace is the answer*.

### **The Church's Message for a New Dawn**

In his teachings for this Jubilee, Pope Francis constantly reminds us that hope is a "*humble, hidden seed of life that, with time, will develop into a large tree.*" Our pilgrimage today is about watering that seed with our prayers, our penance, our repentance and our renewed commitment.

This gathering must be more than a memory; it must be a milestone. It must signal a definitive change - a *metanoia* - in the life of every pilgrim and in our collective consciousness as the Church in Sierra Leone. We cannot leave this holy ground as we came. We must leave as true *Pilgrims of Hope* and *Missionary Disciples*, armed with the conviction that *Peace is the answer*. We must be the *Salt of Sierra Leone* to preserve her from decay, and flavour her with justice. We must be the *Light of Sierra Leone* to guide and lead her out of the darkness of greed, corruption, injustice, lawlessness and violence, and into the glorious dawn of God's peace.

Let us go forth, then, my dear brothers and sisters, with the words of the Prophet Isaiah as our marching orders: "*... those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.*" (Isaiah 40:31).

Our hope does not disappoint, for it is founded on the Risen Lord. And the peace of Christ is the only answer that will heal, sanitize and reconcile our land. May Mary, Our Lady of Sierra Leone, Mother of Hope and Queen of Peace, guide our steps. May God bless you, and may He bless and save our beloved nation, Sierra Leone. Amen.