

WINGS LIKE EAGLES
Musoma Cathedral
Saturday July 4th 2015
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Those of you who know Bishop Hilkih's home here in Musoma will all have seen the photograph, I hope, of the bishop on one side, me on the other side and in the centre, Arsène Wenger, manager of Arsenal Football Club, and arguably the best known football manager in the world. The first time I saw it in Bishop Hilkih's house, I said to him: 'People must be very impressed to see you sitting with Wenger!' 'Oh, no', the bishop replied. 'They think it's a *fake* – someone electronically painted Wenger in!' It's a great story and I often tell it back in England.

But, if you asked me what is the most amazing picture of all in my mind, of Bishop Omindo, I would bring to mind the picture of your bishop at the new training centre which he set up at Buhemba and which was opened, perhaps eighteen months ago, when I was last here. The centre was to help save young people being caught up in all the problems left by the now closed gold mine in the area. It was an amazing day and so many people were profoundly moved by the scheme the bishop had set up. Both television stations were there – and radio. The national minister for education was very sorry not to have heard about it, or he would have been there. It's a marvellous example of the gospel of Jesus in action.

But that scheme was only the latest of so many important initiatives for which Bishop Hilkih will be remembered. The expansion of mission from the time of his consecration leading to the birth of two new dioceses in Roriya and Tarime. The building of schools in Musoma, the expansion of the school in Issenye, the development of the BRAC centre at Buhemba, and perhaps most remarkably, recently, the amazing development of Bunda Bible College. All these too are Jesus for us today. In our first reading, Isaiah's words to Israel included within our first reading capture your bishop's vision, energy and faith in the living God who creates and redeems us – So Isaiah wrote:

'...they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.'

Just before that passage, we read: 'Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.' I can imagine many young men and women falling exhausted at the sheer energy, courage and faith of your bishop!

But before I paint a picture of someone entirely dependent upon their own strength, there is something so much deeper to say about Hilkih Omindo, my friend and Canon of Wakefield. For what is clear from one's first meeting with him is his amazing reliance and acknowledgement of the grace of God. It is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ who provides the energy to Omindo's wings which are indeed like eagles' wings.

In our second reading, from St. Luke's Gospel, we find ourselves caught up into one of the most moving *journeys* in Holy Scripture – Jesus and his disciples on the road to Emmaus. Your bishop's transparent reliance on God's grace has meant that he has been able to be your *mwali* such that you cannot but follow on that Emmaus road. Julius Nyerere, one of my heroes, the father of your nation and your national *mwali* carried under his arm a modest stick or mace, his *fimbo*.

Hilkih Omindo as your *mwali* here has carried two *fimbos*. First of all there has been his staff. He has been a true shepherd of the flock, following the example of Jesus, the

Good Shepherd. But there is another *finbo* which, this time, he carried around his neck and on his breast.

It is, of course, *the cross of Christ*, the sign of our redemption. One of my favourite words in Swahili, which I have used when dedicating many churches and other buildings here in Mara – the word is *mtakatifu*. It is a lovely word, both in its sound, and in its meaning. It captures the pattern of leadership which your bishop has always lived and to which every one of us is called. It's a pattern, of course, which would also have been quite impossible without the equally amazing work of *Baba Martha*. With the Mother's Union alone she has worked miracles.

So *that* Emmaus journey, all the way from Karukerere, the village of his birth to all that I have described has been remarkable. I have described something of your bishop's faith, vision and courage. We celebrate that but we remember too, as I said a moment ago, that it is the vision to which all of us are called in Christ Jesus. That vision is one to which this service points. As Hilkiyah Omindo continues his journey so that points to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leading you all on in your journey as Christian people. So we thank God for your bishop but we challenge you to love the Gospel in your own journey.

This past year has not been without its challenges, its sorrows and we mourn with *Mama Martha* and *Baba Askofu Hilkiyah* for Charles. But we most of all give thanks for all that God has given through both *Martha* and *Baba Askofu Hilkiyah*. We now ask God's blessing on the next steps in their Emmaus journey. We ask to that we shall take up the challenge of Jesus' cross which he has shown to us.

Amen

Readings:

Isaiah. 40. 28-31.

Luke. 24. 13-35.