

# Murder in lagos cathedral

...Parish priest denies incident, but organises cleansing mass

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**Since Thursday, February 28, security at Saint Peter and Paul Catholic Church located on Olowokere Street, at NNPC Bus-Stop, besides Hi-Point Hotel, off Ejigbo-Isole Road, Lagos, has been more tightened than ever before. This follows the gruesome murder on the church premises, by gunmen, of a man said to have gone to a nearby bank to make some cash withdrawals on that fateful day.**

The man simply identified as Henry Obiagazie was said to have run into the church premises as soon as he sensed danger, or with some gunshot wounds, as some other witnesses insist, but unfortunately his hope of being saved in the hallowed sanctuary did not materialize as the daredevil armed robbers went in there and finished the evil work they had earlier started. As a result of the incident, security has now been tightened at the church premises and around the area. In fact, from the nearby Mobil filling station to Bungalow junction, almost everybody is now regarded as a suspect in the murder case, until proven innocent.

## Hope of being on church premises dashed

Obiagazie, popularly known as Papa Emma, before he met his untimely death, was a petty trader in 'provisions' on Church Street, Jakande Estate, Lagos. Though not a member of the Catholic church, he nevertheless ran into its premises with the hope that the robbers who had trailed him from the bank where he had gone to make some cash

withdrawals some minutes earlier would fear and withdraw from their evil mission the moment they noticed that he had gone to seek refuge in God's sanctuary.

Neither could the presence of few people around when they came calling, including the church security details, who wear yellow and blue colour uniform could not deter them from invading the premises which is under renovation. Rather, they chased their victim into the church premises and pumped hot leads into his body, American spy movie style.

According to an account given by a trader who lives close to the church but who begged for anonymity, he was with his neighbours when a woman ran towards his shop, panting. The man who claimed to have been doing business in the area for more than 10 years added that they didn't notice anything until the panting woman drew their attention to the unfolding tragic drama.

### **The alarm from a shocked woman**

The man recalled what happened: "The woman continued to mutter 'I think they just killed him' as she pointed towards the other street leading to the second gate of the church. 'I think they killed him' she muttered again under her breath as she took her leave. We all heard the sound of gunshots, but since the church started the renovation, noise from that area has increased, especially sound from welding machines. The sound we heard resembled that of an electric spark. But after hearing her mutter "they have killed him,' I looked up and saw that the Aboki (Hausa artisan) working on the walls of the church standing still out of shock. It was then I decided to go into the church. Inside the church I found frozen not only the workers on the fence but also everybody. They watched as if in trance the incident unfolds. Nobody tried to help the guy including me. He lay on the floor in a pool of his own blood until the police came around."

According to another account by a parishioner called Scurry who is also a member of the choir as well as Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria, 'CYON,' the victim was coming from the Zenith Bank on Isolo Road when he was trailed by the robbers who obviously must have been monitoring his movement but without him knowing. "He ran from there with bullet wounds and with blood dripping from his body till he entered the church premises for solace. When they followed him into the church premises, they tried to shoot the security man at the gate but the gun jammed and this gave the security man the chance to escape for his dear life."

### **A family member speaks**

When this reporter visited his house at Furniture Avenue behind the Church Street he was told that the wife of the victim identified as Amaka had left the house because of the trauma. It was a visit he was to repeat again and again. On his fourth attempt, a member of the family finally spoke with him on behalf of the traumatized woman who was too weak to talk as a result of shock. The family member said that the last contact the victim had with his wife was on Wednesday, February 27, when he told her that he would be going to a money-lending outfit in Isolo, Lagos, to collect some money. Earlier, Papa Emma had reportedly received a call to that effect, that the loan he had been processing for months had come through and is ready for collection.

According to him, the first inkling that the woman had that all might not be well with her husband was when she saw his husband's international passport which he was supposed to use to collect the loan.

"On that day, she went to her husband's shop at Jakande," the family member who did not want his name in print, narrated. "She got to the office and was surprised that the international passport he needed to collect the loan was still in the shop. She came home and people were looking at her with the eyes of pity but she didn't know why. People were asking about her husband but she kept telling them that he went to the market without knowing that he had been killed. After a while, she called her mother to report that she had not seen her husband. It was not until the following day, Friday, that she found out that her husband had been shot."

### **Twists to the story, and priest's denial**

There are many twists to the story. A source said a supposed guarantor, one Amaechi, who is said to be the victim's church member, is the only person who knew about the money, beside the man's wife. But the source added that he could not go with the victim to collect the money because it was supposed to be ready on Tuesday, March 5, and not Thursday, February 28. He was reportedly surprised that the victim had gone that day to collect the loan and the question now is: who was the guarantor who stood in and signed it for him? The money was to be used to buy wares for his wife's new shop which he was said to have rented the week before he was killed.

Stories about the cold-blooded murder have been circulating within the area since that fateful day, but when Saturday Sun reached the parish priest and spiritual director of Omeiheukwu Jesus Adoration, Rev. Fr. Leo Ukwuani, he denied the killing although sources said he had earlier organized a cleansing mass for the land on Monday this week which was said to have been attended by some parishioners.

### **Reaction from the police**

Confirming the incident, Chike Oti, a Chief Superintendent of Police, who was the state Police Command spokesperson as at last week when he was contacted, said that investigation showed that unknown assailants trailed the man into the church premises and shot him dead. Family members contacted over the murder told the police that some unidentified persons had been threatening him some days before his murder.

"Investigation into the case is on-going to ascertain who could have murdered the young man inside the church premises," he said, before adding with a sigh, "it is quite unfortunate that the man or members of the family did not deem it fit to report a case as serious as threat to life to the police. Such report could have saved his life as detectives would have tracked down and arrested such criminal elements. It is important for Lagosians to always learn to report anything that threatens their security, no matter how seemingly insignificant."



**Rapheal**

