

Gunmen kill policeman in Anambra church

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• Ozubulu: Sins lead to hell, priest tells scanty worshippers

Fear gripped residents of Oguta area of Onitsha in Anambra State yesterday as gunmen shot and killed a policeman guarding the Assemblies of God Church. This came exactly a week after a gunman killed 13 worshippers at St. Philip's Catholic, Ozubulu in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. Many Christians yesterday shunned churches at Ozubulu.

It was learnt that the Oguta gunmen, who rode on a motorcycle, shot the only armed policeman on guard and made away with his AK47 rifle. Witnesses said a commercial motorcyclist was shot dead while the gunmen were trying to escape while the passenger the rider was carrying got injured.

The killed policeman was the only one armed among his colleagues who were providing security at the church while service was going on. However, the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), ASP Nkiru Nwode, said the assailants had been arrested by a police patrol team in Onitsha. Nwode said the gunmen were not operating on a motorcycle but disguised as masqueraders.

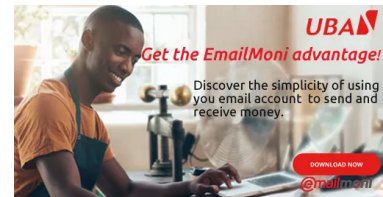
"They shot a policeman but he was not dead, he is now receiving treatment at a hospital. Our men on patrol ran into them and were able to arrest two suspects," the PPRO said. Meanwhile, the sleepy town of Ozubulu was like a ghost town when New Telegraph visited the area. Most of the churches in the town recorded poor attendance, apparently out of fear of another attack.

Though St. Philip's Church was later opened for service, with the parish priest, Rev. Fr. Jude Onwuasor, presiding over the mass, indigenes of the community were barely in attendance. Strangers from outside the town, including journalists and government officials, were the majority of worshippers in attendance. In his homily, Onwuasor urged

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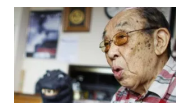


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people to refrain from crimes capable of leading them to hell. He said: "The Bible makes it clear that any soul that sins shall die. It is wrong to shed the blood of a fellow human being because you didn't create it."



An indigene of the town, Miss Ebele Onwuaso, said she attended the service out of faith because that was the closest church to her home. Onwuaso, who was in company with her grandmother, said: "Even though I was not in town when the incident took place, I summoned courage to be here."

My siblings refused to come. I think it is the faith I have in God that gave me the courage. You can see that only a few people from this area attended service today. It is out of fear and I don't blame them. But I know people will come around with time."

However, most of the villagers were still apprehensive and worried that there might be another strike as they preferred to stay in their homes. They did not want to talk to journalists to avoid either being arrested or questioned.

A young man, sitting in front of a shop close to St. Philip's Catholic Church, said what happened in Ozubulu a week ago was nothing anybody could forget easily. He said: "It will take time for people to get over that ugly incident. Imagine how dry everywhere is. People are afraid to come out or go to the church."

The young men are afraid to come out and play football for fear of being picked up. My house is down there (pointed at the area) but I couldn't go to church because of fear of the unknown. It is a nightmare which we are yet to wake up from. I pray God will help us heal soon."

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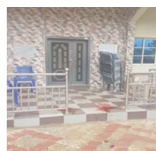
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