

'I can' voices must ask whether we celebrate time or eternity?

BY MICHAEL C. GABRIELE
Editor

NEWARK—"I can."

These were the two simple words used by Rev. Msgr. Anselm I. Nwaorgu, Ph.D., in his passionate homily during a Mass celebrated Nov. 6 at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, to succinctly define the spirit, faith, vision, courage and leadership of Bishop Joseph A. Francis.

The Office of African American, African and Caribbean Apostolate for the Archdiocese of Newark hosted the third annual Bishop Joseph A. Francis Mass and Awards Luncheon. Archbishop John J. Myers presided at the 11 a.m. Mass.

Bishop Francis, who died in 1997, was ordained in 1976 as the first African-American bishop in the archdiocese and the fourth in the country (see *The Catholic Advocate*, Feb. 10). Born in Lafayette, LA, in 1923, Bishop Francis was ordained to the priesthood on Oct. 7, 1950 and became a national pioneer for social justice.

In his homily, Msgr. Nwaorgu, the pastor of Blessed Sacrament/Saint Charles Borromeo Parish, said "Bishop Francis never lacked the inner voice of 'I can' because of the One who strengthened him. Bishop Francis believed that God would see him through; that the strength of God strengthened him. If Bishop Francis never said 'I can,' we would not be here. Today we celebrate the man who moved and pushed the Church to justice."

However, Msgr. Nwaorgu pointed out that "I can" must be more than an individual declaration of faith. He also warned those gathered at the Cathedral of the corrosive "structures of unbelief," the insidious voices that prevent people from fulfilling the plan that God has called them to be.

"The words 'I can' must translate as a mission for a faithful community," Msgr. Nwaorgu said. "Today we must say 'we can' to speak hope to a society that is becoming more hopeless. We must say 'we can' to young people and the poor. If my 'I can' and your 'I can' cannot join together and speak of power and faith to our society, then today we only celebrate time and not eternity."

Award recipients this year at the luncheon included Archbishop Emeritus Peter L. Gerety, who resides at Saint John Vianney Residence, Rutherford; Esperanza Martinez of Saint Anastasia Parish, Teaneck; Gregory Banks of Transfiguration Academy, Bergenfield; Father William Reed of Sacred Heart Parish; and Rev. Msgr. James Finnerty of Saint Paul the Apostle Parish, Jersey City.



Advocate photo – M. Gabriele

Pictured at the Bishop Joseph A. Francis awards luncheon are (left to right) Rev. Msgr. Richard J. Arnolds, archdiocesan Vicar for Pastoral Life; Archbishop John J. Myers; Rev. Msgr. Anselm I. Nwaorgu, Ph.D., pastor of Blessed Sacrament/Saint Charles Borromeo Parish, Newark; and Sister Patricia Lucas, D.H.M., the director of the African American, African and Caribbean Apostolate.