

## A TRIBUTE TO MMARAIHE

"WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" is the title of a book I once read. Citizens of a small village were challenged to examine their lives and allow the answer to dictate every decision they made thereafter. The book depicts a story of commitment and courage, a challenge to walk in faith and power and most importantly love.

Let me share with you how Mmaraihe answered that question with her life. Born to Chukwuocha and Martha Onyeonoro Oriala of Ehume community in Umuahia, Nigeria, Mmaraihe was the middle child of three daughters. Her father died at a very tender age, so she was left to take care of her mother and younger sister, Nnochiri. Her older sister, Afomnma died at a very young age also, childbearing. As a very young woman she self-enrolled and was self-sponsored into the famous Domestic Centre in Umuahia, now called Junior Girls Secondary School. Mmaraihe later was married to Ezekiel Ufomba Ukenye and joined him in Tiko, Southern Cameroons same year 1955. Mmaraihe had seven children of which three of them are boys and four girls; namely, Ann Chinyere, Elizabeth Anya, Lawrence Obisike, Florece Ugonma, Jonah Iheanacho, Felix Obichereihe and Lovelyn Chioma.

Early memories of Mmaraihe include early morning risings for every member of the household; born children and house help alike. Her motto was "you work hard you chop hard" and she meant hard work.

These were times of war and hardship in Nigeria, although physically she now resided in Tiko Cameroon. She worked with the discipline of a true soldier, with lots of love, alongside with her husband to provide for the needs of her family. It was her hearts desire for all of her children to have formal education to whatever level they desired, more so as she had very little formal education.

Humility, patience, the fear of God, peace, unity and ultimately love was the embodiment of her very existence. Mmaraihe truly feared God and loved people. She always found something good to say about people. Her thing was "if you had nothing good to say, do not say anything at all." She fought hard against injustice. She had a true and wonderful passion for God, and a deep compassion for people.

Starting with nothing she used what she had, the strength and wisdom God gave to her and the knowledge she gained from attending Umuahia Domestic Center and opened a family restaurant/grocery. By dedicating her five loaves and two fishes (the restaurant) to God it was multiplied to feed and bless thousands. Mmaraihe Ukenye believed the Lord who said "true and undefiled religion before God the father is to visit orphans and widows in their trouble." Her home was never filled with only immediate family, but always there were others that she was helping. I remember several trips to her hometown always returning with some young person she wanted to help. Wisdom ruled her household. The philosophy that the key to freedom was education and

discipline for all was her mainstay. Chores had to be completed in a timely manner and with excellence. Many times as the eldest daughter I had to return to the marketplace with a purchase because the item was not in the perfect condition she expected. Her favorite words, "Cambridge University is for any child who desires education" she sought for all. Although she stressed academics and religious educations, she taught lessons of life and how to be a survivor in life, the history of our origin in Umuahia and the language of our people the Ibo Language. Many of the wards that she sought to help wanted the easy life and immediate gratification. She couldn't instill in them the dream she held for them and so she would return them home at their request. This however would not dampen her desire to help; rather it inspired her on to seek for more and more help. Of those who stayed the course many are enjoying successful lives. 'Look up and think big' echoes what she wanted us to do.

The wise King once wrote:

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm all the days of her life. She selects wool ('abada' cloth) and flax ('kente cloth'), and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ship bringing them food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark (early morning risings). She provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy..... Her husband is respected at the city gate..... She makes linen garments ('kente cloth') and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity. She can laugh at days to come. She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

A wife of noble character who can find? Ezekiel Ufomba Ukenye did. Her children arise and call her blessed: Ann Chinyere, as the first child of seven has grown up to realizing that, the wonderful life-style of Mama Mmaraihe cannot be easily practiced by humans, so the best way I find fit to appreciate her is by laying this Foundation in memory of her, as she can only be remembered for what she did. Being consoled with the knowledge that the dead in Christ are honored in their sleep as they will rise soon, Mama's spiritual, biological and family children will see her to say "you were remembered"

The Mmaraihe Memorial foundation (The MM Foundation) for the needy and poor is not new to Umuahia. Started in the life of Mmaraihe Ukenye who gave all she could to humanity. 'Give and it shall be given you, good measures, pressed down and shaken together and running over shall men give unto your bosom'