

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

**EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION
AT THE SHRINE OF THE HOLY UGANDA MARTYRS OF NAMUGONGO**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Kampala (Uganda)
Sunday, 7 February 1993*

*Baana bange abaagalwa,
Mbalamusizza mwenna.
Mwebale okujja.
Katonda Kitaffe tumugulumize.*

(My beloved sons and daughters,
I greet you all.
Thanks for coming.
Let us praise God our Father).

"The effects of the light are seen in *complete goodness and right living and truth*" (Eph. 5: 9).

1. Today is Sunday. Jesus Christ, the *Light of the world* (Cf. Jn. 8: 12), is risen from the dead! At the Shrine of the Holy Martyrs of Uganda, we have gathered to celebrate Christ the Light of the world.

Christ's Resurrection fulfilled the words spoken to the Holy City Jerusalem by the Prophet Isaiah: "Your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising on you... above you the Lord now rises and above you his glory appears" (Is. 60: 1-2).

Isaiah then said: "*The nations come to your light... your sons from far away*" (Ibid. 60: 3-4). Yes. From far away *the nations have come*: from countless lands and peoples of the earth. For two thousand years. *You too have come, people of Uganda*, sons and daughters of Africa. You too have seen the light of Christ's Resurrection. The light which produces "complete goodness and right living and truth".

2. *This is the place where Christ's light shone on your land with a particular splendour*. This was the place of darkness, Namugongo, where Christ's light shone bright in the great fire which consumed Saint Charles Lwanga and his companions. May the light of that holocaust never cease to shine in Africa!

The heroic sacrifice of the Martyrs helped to draw Uganda and all of Africa to Christ, the true light which enlightens all men (Cf. *ibid.* 1: 9). *Men and women of every race, language, people and nation* (Cf. Rev. 5: 9) have answered Christ's call, have followed him and have become members of his Church, like the crowds which come on pilgrimage, year after year, to Namugongo.

Today, *the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Saint Peter*, has also come on pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Holy Uganda Martyrs. Following in the footsteps of Pope Paul VI, who raised these

sons of your land to the glory of the altars and later was the first Pope to visit Africa, I too wish to plant a special kiss of peace on this holy ground.

From this place I am pleased to greet the President of the *Republic of Uganda* and the representatives of the Government who honour us by their presence.

I greet all the members of the Church in Uganda. I rejoice to greet *Archbishop Emmanuel Wamala and all my Brother Bishops of Uganda*, particularly the Bishops of the South: Bishop Adrian Ddungu of Masaka, Bishop Joseph Willigers of Jinja and Bishop Joseph Mukwaya of Kiyinda–Mityana. I also welcome all the Cardinals and Bishops who have come from other countries to take part in this celebration. I greet the *priests and the men and women Religious* who have devoted their lives to serving their brothers and sisters in the faith. *Today too my greetings go in a special way to Uganda's lay faithful*. I embrace you with love in the Lord Jesus. You are the heirs of the strong and faithful lay leaders with which the Church in Uganda was blessed from the beginning.

3. "You were darkness once", Saint Paul told the Ephesians, "but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph. 5: 8).

How eloquent were the words of Pope Paul VI in his homily at the canonization of the Uganda Martyrs!

"Who could foresee", the Pope asked, "that with the great historical figures of African martyrs and confessors like Cyprian, Felicity and Perpetua and the outstanding Augustine, we should one day list the beloved names of Charles Lwanga, Matthias Mulumba Kalemba and their twenty companions?" (Paul VI, *Homily on the occasion of the canonization of the Uganda Martyrs*, 18 October 1964).

Truly the *Uganda Martyrs became light in the Lord!* Their sacrifice hastened the rebirth of the Church in Africa. In our own days, *all Africa is being called to the light of Christ!* Africa is being called again to discover her true identity in the light of faith in the Son of God. All that is truly African, all that is true and good and noble in Africa's traditions and cultures, is meant to find its fulfilment in Christ. The Uganda Martyrs show this clearly: they were the truest of Africans, worthy heirs of the virtues of their ancestors. In embracing Jesus Christ, they opened the door of faith to their own people (Cf. Acts. 14: 27), so that the glory of the Lord could shine on Uganda, on Africa.

4. Here at Namugongo, it is right that we give thanks to God for all those who have worked and prayed and shed their blood for the rebirth of the Church on this Continent. We give thanks for all who have carried on the work of the Martyrs by striving to build a Church that is truly Catholic and truly African.

In the first place, I wish to acknowledge the outstanding service provided by your *catechists*. In recent times some of them, like the martyrs of old, have even been called to give their lives for Christ. The history of the Church in Uganda clearly shows that generations of catechists have offered "a singular and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church" (Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 17) in your country.

How obvious this was even at the dawn of Christianity in Uganda! Despite the fact that they themselves had only recently come to know Christ, your Martyrs joyfully shared with others the good news about the One who is "the way and the truth and the life" (Jn. 14: 6). They understood that "faith is strengthened when it is given to others" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2).

Dear Catechists: What you have freely received, you must freely give! (Cf. Mt. 10: 8) *Deepen your knowledge of the Church's faith*, so that you can share its treasures ever more fully with others.

Always strive to think with the Church. Above all else you must be devoted to personal prayer. *Only if your ministry is nourished by prayer and sustained by genuine Christian living will it bear lasting fruit.* Your catechesis can never be only instruction about Christ and his Church. It must also be a school of prayer, where the baptized learn to grow into an ever deeper and more conscious relationship with God the Father, with Jesus, the first-born of many brothers and sisters (Cf. Rom. 8: 29), and with the Holy Spirit, the giver of eternal life.

The effects of Christ's light must clearly be seen in the goodness of your lives! You must be examples of a faith that is rooted in a personal relationship to Jesus, lived in full communion with the Church. Your faith must be clearly seen in your obedience to the Gospel, in your lives of charity and service, and in your missionary zeal towards those who still do not believe or who no longer live the faith they received at Baptism.

Take to heart Saint Paul's lesson: be examples of patience and charity towards all people, mindful that if you have not love, then you are nothing at all (Cf. 1Cor. 13).

5. *"You are light in the Lord!"* How brightly the light of Christ shines in the lives of the *lay men and women committed to the pursuit of holiness* in the quiet and often hidden circumstances of their lives! In particular I wish to express the Church's esteem for *the women of Uganda*. I encourage you: do not be afraid to let your voices be heard! God has given Ugandan women important gifts to share for the building of a more human and loving society, a society which respects the dignity of all people, especially of children and those most in need. How important is the apostolate of *Christian families* for the growth of society and of the Church! Christian married couples: be faithful to each other! Never forget the sacred calling you have received to pass on the faith and to train the younger generation to live in a way pleasing to God. Africa needs the witness of Christian families, families which are schools of generosity, patience, dialogue and respect for the needs of others!

I am pleased to see here the representatives of the various *Associations and Ecclesial Movements* which play so important a role in the life of your local Churches. Dear friends: your desire for holiness and authentic Christian living is a great gift of God to the Church in our time. Be of one mind and heart with the Church's pastors. Jesus is calling you to be missionaries of his love, and a leaven of reconciliation and renewal in the midst of his People. I encourage your efforts to bring the Good News of Christ to all, particularly to the lukewarm and to those who are not reached by the Church's ordinary pastoral care.

6. *"Shine out, for your light has come!"* (Is. 60: 1).

Christ's words are addressed to you, the lay faithful of Uganda! To each of you Christ says: "Your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5: 16).

How much the people of Uganda need the light of the Gospel in order to dispel the darkness still left by long years of civil unrest, violence and fear. Today, Uganda stands at the crossroads: her people need the salt of God's word to bring out the virtues of honesty, goodness, justice, concern for the dignity of others, which alone can guarantee the rebuilding of their country on a firm foundation.

Uganda needs to hear the word of God! How many of your brothers and sisters have still not met Christ! To all of you I repeat today that challenge which Pope Paul VI left to you: you must become missionaries to yourselves! Let your enthusiasm for evangelization be accompanied by an ever more sincere commitment to work for the unity of all who profess the name of Christ. Relations between Christians should be marked by harmony and a spirit of mutual respect. Despite

divisions, efforts to promote Christian unity are themselves a powerful sign of the reconciliation which God wishes to accomplish in our midst (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 50).

7. Laity of Uganda! *"You must be the salt of the earth and the light of the world"* (Cf. Mt. 5: 13-14). If your works contain the salt of "goodness, right living and truth", then *your lives will truly become light for your neighbours*.

Christ calls you *to lead a life pleasing to God*. When you were reborn in the waters of Baptism, you were made a new creation, given a share in his divine life and sent forth to bear witness to the One who called us out of darkness into his kingdom of light (Cf. Col. 1: 13).

Saint Paul says it very clearly: *"Have nothing to do with the futile works of darkness"* (Eph. 5: 11). You have renounced Satan and his works. You have been bought at the price of Christ's Blood, so you must never deny him by turning to idols, or by abandoning your Christian way of life for the empty promises of a culture of death! "You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord" (Ibid. 5: 9). *Let the Martyrs be your inspiration!* They did not profess Christ with their lips alone. They showed their love for God by keeping his commandments (Cf. 1Jn. 5: 3). Christ's image shone forth in them with a spiritual power that even now draws people to him. In their lives and in their deaths, the Martyrs revealed the power of the Cross, the power of a faith that is stronger than fear, a life that triumphs over death, a hope that lights up the future, and a love that reconciles the bitterest of enemies.

8. "The Lord will be your everlasting light" (Is. 60: 20). I thank God for this opportunity to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with you at the Shrine of the Holy Martyrs of Uganda. The Martyrs were called upon, amid this beloved African people, to "shine in the sight of men" (Mt. 5: 16). In them Christ's parables of salt and light have been fulfilled. In their earthly life, the Martyrs "tried to discover what the Lord wants" (Cf. Eph. 5: 10) and acted in a way worthy of the calling they had received. As followers of Christ, they were ready even to give their lives for him.

The Holy Spirit "lit this light" in Namugongo. Through the ministry of the Church, he also ensured that the light would not remain hidden, but would "shine for everyone in the house" (Cf. Mt. 5: 15): in your house, in Uganda and in all Africa.

Mwebale okumpuliriza. Kristu abeere ekitangaala Mu Africa Yonna.
(Grazie per avermi ascoltato. Possa Cristo essere la luce di tutta l'Africa).

From: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19930207_kampala.html