

Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, 22 February 2018

Commemoration of the First Meeting between Kabaka Muteesa I and Fr. Simeon Lourdel Mapeera

(23rd February 1879)

Homily by His Excellency, Michael August Blume, Apostolic Nuncio to Uganda



The historical moment of the first meeting of the Catholic missionaries and Kabaka Muteesa was the fruit of the missionary vocation that Jesus Christ had entrusted to the Church and to the first of the Apostles, St. Peter, the grace of whose office and mission we celebrate today with the whole Church.

At its centre is his profession of faith: “You are the Christ, the son of the Living God.” This truth is not a secret for a small group of chosen ones. Rather it is the heart of the Good

News that Jesus called Peter and the other Apostles, their successors and collaborators, to spread throughout the whole world: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

“And, behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” This is something that the Christian community experiences every time it gathers together in Christ’s name, listens to his word, prays in the unity of the Holy Spirit, and is nourished by the Bread of Life. This has been the experience of the Christian community for 2000 years, where people are touched by the love of Christ whom they meet in his disciples. There His word stirs people in the deepest recesses of their hearts, there his mercy can bring even the greatest of sinners to peace with God. This experience must be shared: “Go out into the whole world, make disciples of all nations.....”.

It was this missionary mandate, received by Peter and the whole Church, that bore fruit in the vocation of Fr. Simeon Lourdel and Bro. Amans Delmas to accept what Our Lord promised to those who leave all for the sake of his Kingdom. After a long sea voyage and the adventure of crossing Lake Victoria in rickety boats, they entered Buganda Kingdom. Their communion with the Successor of St. Peter and with Our Lord himself is what gave these missionaries courage to stand up courageously to the many challenges, including hostile foreigners, and proclaim the truth of Christ and his Church beginning that day in the court of Kabaka Muteesa.

On many occasions after that, they had to answer to friend and foe alike that key question of Our Lord himself: “But who do you say that I am?” And there were other questions too, for example: What do you say the Church is? How is it different from outside powers who were only interested in making money? Our first missionaries answered not only in words but especially in deeds that manifested Christ’s mercy for the poor the poor, the sick and the little ones.

This beginning was also accompanied by the many trials that the Lord promises those who serve him. It was, however, precisely in these obstacles that God manifested his strength. God's strength indeed does shine in mortal men, even when they weakened, but not discouraged by disease, poor nutrition, fatigue and the treachery of other human beings but who do not give up.

That day, 139 years ago, was the beginning of proclaiming the Good News – evangelizing – and eventually, as people embraced the faith, the start of tending the flock of God in their midst, willingly as God would have it, with no other reward except that of knowing they were following their Divine Master who reserved for them an “unfading crown of glory”.



**Katikkiro of Buganda, Ow'Ekit. Charles P. Mayiga with
the Nuncio and the Archbishop of Kampala**

The fruit of this early event has been the formation of new Church communities in Uganda, the gatherings of those who believe in Jesus Christ in communion with the Apostle Peter and his successors, who bind and lose for the sake of the Gospel.

Perhaps the most important act of binding by Peter and his successors has been the continual confirmation that preaching and witnessing to the Word of God in its integrity must be at the heart of the Church's mission. We see this in the approval that the Blessed Pope Pius IX gave to the establishment of the Missionary Society of the White Fathers and other important missionary congregations during his pontificate. This is what all members of the Church, including all of us here present today, are called to do in season and out of season, according to particular vocation that each of us has received. We are called to carry out this mission, as Pope Francis so often emphasizes, in response to concrete challenges of our times. As Successor of Peter, Pope Francis also binds on us to have minds and hearts attentive to the little ones, those on the peripheries of our contemporary society, those for whom Our Lord always showed a special attention, the little ones of our world.

Today is not just a commemoration of the past event. It is an event that the Holy Spirit has made to grow and prosper for the last 139 years, an event which involves us here present and all our Christian brothers and sisters, an event which continues to carry the Church forward up to this day. Yes, the same Holy Spirit that guided our first missionaries is with us, showing us the way, strengthening our communities in their trials and challenges, always pushing each of us to leave our comfort zones and reach out to the limits of the earth, the limits of our cities and township. There we will always find many people who long for the Lord and his goodness, people who, in fact, become Christ pleading with each of us to come and touch Him in them and serve him with mercy and love. "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me."

May God give us the grace to celebrate every year this happy event in the history of the Church in Uganda so that each of us may continue to receive and experience the joy of the Gospel in sharing this grace with our brothers and sisters.



Singing Buganda Kingdom Anthem