



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO KENYA, UGANDA AND THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
(25-30 NOVEMBER 2015)

MEETING WITH PRIESTS, MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND SEMINARIANS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

St Mary's Cathedral, Kampala (Uganda)
Saturday, 28 November 2015

[Multimedia]

I gave the bishop in charge of consecrated life [the message I wrote for you](#), so it can be published. With your pardon I will speak in my native tongue, since I don't speak English.

There are three things I want to tell you. First, in the book of Deuteronomy Moses keeps telling the people: "Don't forget!". And repeats this at various times throughout the book: Don't forget! Don't forget all that God has done for his people!

So the first thing I want to tell you is this: ask for, and preserve, the grace of remembrance, of memory. I told the young people that the blood of the martyrs runs in the veins of the Catholics of Uganda. Don't ever forget that! That way you will keep the faith. The biggest enemy of remembrance is forgetfulness, but it is not the most dangerous one. The most dangerous enemy of remembrance is when we take for granted everything we have received, everything that has been passed down to us. The Church in Uganda must never let the memory of those martyrs fade. A martyr is a witness. To remain faithful to that memory, the Church in Uganda has to continue to bear witness; you must not just live off this legacy. Past glories were a beginning, but you are called to create future glories. This is what the Church asks of you. Be witnesses like the martyrs, who gave their lives for the Gospel.

To be witnesses – and this is the second thing I want to say – we need to be faithful. Faithful to remembrance, faithful to our vocation, faithful to apostolic zeal. Fidelity means persevering on the

path of holiness. Perhaps here in Uganda there are some dioceses with many priests and others with few. Fidelity means telling the bishop that you are willing to go to another diocese which needs missionaries. And that is not easy. Fidelity means persevering in our vocation. Here I think in a special way of the example of fidelity which the Sisters of the House of Charity gave me: fidelity to the poor, the sick, those in greatest need, because that is where we find Christ. Uganda was watered by the blood of martyrs, witnesses. Today, it still needs to be watered, in order to rise to new challenges, new forms of witness, new missions. Otherwise, the great treasure you possess will be lost and the “Pearl of Africa” will end up like a museum piece, because this is the way the devil attacks us – slowly but surely. Here I am speaking not only to priests but to religious as well. What I said to the priests had to do in a special way with the problem of *missionary spirit*: that dioceses with many priests should offer some to those with less clergy; in this way Uganda will keep alive the missionary spirit.

Remembrance means fidelity, and fidelity is only possible with prayer. Once a religious or a priest stops praying or prays too little, because he says he has too much work, he has already begun to lose his memory; she has already begun to lose her fidelity. Prayer also means humility. The humility to see our confessor regularly and to confess our sins. You cannot limp with both legs! We religious and priests cannot lead a double life. If you sin, ask God’s forgiveness! But don’t keep covering up those things that God does not love, don’t hide your lack of fidelity, don’t put your memory in a drawer.

Remembrance amid new challenges, fidelity to memory and fidelity to prayer – a prayer which always begins with the acknowledgment that we are sinners. With these three pillars, the “Pearl of Africa” will continue to be a pearl and not just an empty word. May the Martyrs who gave this Church its strength help you to persevere in remembrance, fidelity and prayer. And I ask you, please, remember to pray for me. Thank you very much

Now, I invite you to pray together a “Hail Mary” to Our Lady.

Prepared address by the Holy Father:

Dear Brother Priests, Religious and Seminarians,

I am happy to be with you, and I thank you for your cordial welcome. I especially thank the speakers for bearing witness to your hopes and concerns, and, above all, the joy which inspires you in your service to God’s people in Uganda.

I am pleased, too, that our meeting takes place on the eve of the First Sunday of Advent, a season which invites us to look to *new beginnings*. This Advent we are also preparing to cross the threshold of the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy which I have called for the whole Church.

As we approach the Jubilee of Mercy, I would ask you two questions. First: *who are you*, as priests or future priests, and as consecrated persons? In one sense, the answer is an easy one: surely you are men and women whose lives have been shaped by a “personal encounter with Jesus Christ” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 3). Jesus has touched your hearts, called you by name, and asked you to follow him with an undivided heart in the service of his holy people.

The Church in Uganda has been blessed, in its short yet venerable history, with a great cloud of witnesses – lay faithful, catechists, priests and religious – who forsook everything for the love of Jesus: homes, families, and, in the case of the martyrs, their own lives. In your own lives, whether in the priestly ministry or in your religious consecration, you are called to carry on this great legacy, above all with quiet acts of humble service. Jesus wants to use you to touch the hearts of yet other people: he wants to use your mouths to proclaim his saving word, your arms to embrace the poor whom he loves, your hands to build up communities of authentic missionary disciples. May we never forget that our “yes” to Jesus is a “yes” to his people. Our doors, the doors of our churches, but above all the doors of our hearts, must constantly be open to God’s people, our people. For that is who we are.

A second question I would ask you tonight is: *What more are you called to do* in living your specific vocation? Because there is always more that we can do, another mile to be walked on our journey.

God’s people, indeed all people, yearn for new life, forgiveness and peace. Sadly, there are many troubling situations in our world for which we must pray, beginning with realities closest to us. I pray especially for the beloved people of Burundi, that the Lord may awaken in their leaders and in society as a whole a commitment to dialogue and cooperation, reconciliation and peace. If we are to accompany those who suffer, then like the light passing through the stained glass windows of this Cathedral, we must let God’s power and healing pass through us. We must first let the waves of his mercy flow over us, purify us, and refresh us, so that we can bring that mercy to others, especially those on the peripheries.

All of us know well how difficult this can be. There is so much work to be done. At the same time, modern life also offers so many distractions which can dull our consciences, dissipate our zeal, and even lure us into that “spiritual worldliness” which eats away at the foundations of the Christian life. The work of conversion – that conversion which is the heart of the Gospel of Jesus (cf. *Mk 1:15*) – must be carried out each day, in the battle to recognize and overcome those habits and ways of thinking which can fuel spiritual complacency. We need to examine our consciences, as individuals and as communities.

As I mentioned, we are entering the season of Advent, which is a time of new beginnings. In the Church we like to say that Africa is the continent of hope, and with good reason. The Church in these lands is blessed with an abundant harvest of religious vocations. This evening I would offer a special word of encouragement to the young seminarians and religious present. The Lord’s call

is a source of joy and a summons to serve. Jesus tells us that “it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (*Lk 6:45*). May the fire of the Holy Spirit purify your hearts, so that you can be joyful and convincing witnesses to the hope of the Gospel. You have a beautiful word to speak! May you always speak it, above all, by the integrity and conviction of your lives.

Dear brothers and sisters, my visit to Uganda is brief, and today was a very long day! But I consider our meeting tonight to be the crowning of this beautiful day when I was able to go as a pilgrim to the Shrine of the Uganda Martyrs at Namugongo, and to meet with the many young people who are the future of the nation and our Church. Truly I leave Africa with great hope in the harvest of grace which God is preparing in your midst! I ask all of you to pray for an outpouring of apostolic zeal, for joyful perseverance in the calling you have received, and, above all, for the gift of a pure heart ever open to the needs of all our brothers and sisters. In this way the Church in Uganda will truly prove worthy of its glorious heritage and face the challenges of the future with sure hope in Christ's promises. I will remember all of you in my prayers, and I ask you, please, to pray for me!