

# **MY LORD AND MY GOD!**

**(Jn. 20:28)**

**By Fr. Dr. Deogratias Ssonko**

**Dedication**

**TO MOTHER MARY,  
Our model of Faith:**

**"Blessed are you who believed  
that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" Lk. 1:45**

**And**

**TO SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE  
Model of Doubters:  
"My Lord and My God" Jn. 20:28**

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# Introduction

My Brother and Sister on this, Our Mother Earth, at this particular point in time, may I pray you to begin with me these reflections about my amazing journey of love that has taken me from the humble beginnings of Katongero village, Nazareth Parish, where I was Baptized, to the present day, where I am: A Silver Jubilee Priest. Allow me to use the words of the great “Doubter”, a man of systematic doubting, to express the summary of my wonders and admiration of this mysterious journey of Love. This man, ‘the philosopher disciple,’ is Thomas the Apostle, who at first refused to believe that Jesus had resurrected and appeared to his Disciples in his absence.

‘Doubting’ Thomas went on to become an outstanding ‘Believing’ Thomas, also called “Thomas the Believer,” after the Lord’s rebuke: “*Then he said to Thomas ‘Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.’ Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and My God” Jn. 20:28.”(Jn. 20:27-28).* By saying this Thomas was testifying to the fact that the one before him was not a mere human being, but his personal Lord and God, his KYRIOS and THEOS. Hence, his public profession of Faith in the Divinity of Jesus, with the expression “My Lord and My God.” By so professing he placed himself in perfect synch with Our Mother Mary whom Elizabeth had more than thirty years earlier declared our Model of Faith when she said to her, “**Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” Lk.1:45**

I wish to rhyme that exclamation and acclamation of faith by discovering the great works of God in my journey of life, knowing very well that it is not very different from yours. In these pages, therefore, as we celebrate the Silver Jubilee of my Priestly Ministry, I would like to welcome you to travel with me in print, through the great works of this Lord and God in my life. On the day of my Baptism I was officially incorporated into the threefold Ministry of Christ: The Prophet, the Priest and The King. Please reflect with me about your own life pilgrimage as we renew our Baptismal call by living out the everyday moments of our lives with faith, hope and love.

Theologically looked at, it was “*Through Him, with Him and in Him*”, this **Lord and God the Prophet, the Priest and the King** that everything was created and is recreated.<sup>1</sup> Also in the Philosophy of Religion we learn that each religion has the same three pillars, namely its Doctrine, its Rituals and its Way of life.<sup>2</sup> We live these three pillars in Mother Church in the following ways:-

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 11:30; “All things came to be through Him and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1:3); Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:1-2 and Eph 2:10.

<sup>2</sup> This is an anthropological structure that is seen in most organizations. In Political science one will expect the teaching or doctrine to be shown in the Manifesto and slogans of the party, the rites are the symbols used like the color, flag and others. Definitely, one would wait to see the way of life of the members of such a party. The New Catholic Catechism also was arranged according to this anthropological and theological truth. The First Part is the Creed, which is a proclamation of the Teaching of Christ, the Prophet. The Second Part is on Liturgy (Sanctifying

1. As the Teaching Ministry of Jesus Christ the Prophet.
2. As the Sanctifying Ministry of Jesus Christ the Priest
3. As the Governing Ministry of Jesus Christ the King.<sup>3</sup>

When I now look back, I can confidently testify to the amazing fact that my life with God has more or less followed the categories of these three Ministries. And because of that, I wish to kindly invite you to join me, during this Jubilee Event, in exclaiming in faith, together with Saint Thomas the Apostle: “*MY LORD AND MY GOD!*”

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Ministry), thus pointing to Jesus, the Priest and the Third Part is Christian Living (Way of Life) which means Jesus, the Priest and thus the Governing Ministry.

<sup>3</sup> We are very well aware that during the rite of Baptism, soon after the pouring of Holy water on the individual, follows the anointing with Holy Chrism using the following words: “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life”. (Rite of Baptism) I am proud of the current Kampala Archdiocesan Synod Statutes (2006) where all Christ’s Activity in his Church are summarized in these three ministries: The Teaching, the Sanctifying and the Governing ministry. One will also notice that the Canadian Catholic Episcopal Conference, at national level also uses the same arrangement. This is a novelty because the teaching has been handed over for years but the practical aspect of giving them a pastoral structure had not been seen so vividly as in Kampala Archdiocese and in Canada.



# **PART ONE:**

## **The Teaching Ministry**

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### **Chapter I**

#### **Creation and Early Formation**

##### **The Mystery of Creation**

God who is Love must surely have loved me! Similar to Prophet Jeremiah's case, He knew me as 'would-be-prophet' eternally before I was formed in my mother's womb (Jer. 1:5). All words about any wonder are less than its real value *in se* (= *in itself*). *No wonder, all people look more impressive before they say a word; for light is faster than sound!*

I was born on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1959 at *Katongero*, Nazareth Catholic Parish in Masaka Diocese, in *Rakai* District. To be mathematically precise, I must have 'descended' down here on earth the previous year, around 5<sup>th</sup> December 1958. These are the Nine months before my birth date. It is very interesting to note here, that the dates of conception and birth of Mother Mary are 8<sup>th</sup> December and 8<sup>th</sup> September, respectively.

##### **Each Person is Unique**

People usually consider walking on water or in thin air as the only miracles. But I think the real miracle is not so much in walking either on water or in thin air, but to normally walk on this

earth. Every day we are engaged in a special miracle which we may however not easily recognize: The blue sky, the white clouds, the green leaves, the curious eyes of a child -- our own two eyes... All this is a miracle. I find it very important to ponder the greatness of the Divine Satellite: God who decided my day of creation. No one decides to be born. That I am one of the living created human persons is a magnificent surprise. My parents too were not my choice! God, out of his infinite love and mercy created me for this particular family to which I belong; a Catholic Community, a factor of which I am very proud. I know that the theology of "ifs" is unacceptable, we should start on the given: *datum*. But I just imagine casually that in bringing me in time God would have chosen any other family; but for me He chose Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Mutuba Lutaaya and Elizabeth Family! This too is a unique choice of His love.

There are more than seven billion people in this world and yet not any two of them are identical. Each person is the first and last of the scale of his personal identity and presence. There is no "mass production" with God. Though every person is different, God places Himself in each one of us without repeating Himself. That is the richness of God. This is why there is no such thing as a weird human being. It's just that some people require more understanding than others. God really put Himself in me in Eternity and at His desired moment brought me into time to become that baby who was baptized "*Deogratias*". The day was ... January 1960. Yes, He did that to no other person because there is no "*other me*" in the whole world, in heaven, and on earth, anywhere! This is why am uniquely loved by Him. In the eyes of God, every person is *one of a kind* in the best sense of the phrase. The Creator has made every individual irreplaceable for all Eternity. As He does in nature, in man He also loves a billion-fold variety. Every human person uniquely bears what is specific of God in its specific identity. We, individually have a unique share of the divine essence infinitely given to us in our finite measure.

## My Very Identity

My personal identity and real personhood was given me at my creation but my personality was added at birth on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1959. It was this day when a cry pierced the silence of the village "Katongero", women walking to the well stopped, women weeding their banana plantations paused: "a new baby boy is born of Nakimera". This was Deo Ssonko. Every human person is finite in so far as he is this particular identity but is infinite in the order of God's 'giving' to him. We have an infinite proximate and remote passive ability to infinitely receive from God, the Infinite Giver.

Every human being is the first and last of a series; and so am I. That originality in me is my very personhood. Metaphysically, the very definition of my individual identity and presence is the very reason for my not being the other. My *thisness*, is the very reason for not being in the other's *otherness*! The "other" is the very ground for that other not being "my self". This is why God has no definition in the sense of the *de finis* (=about the end, the purpose). Understandably, this is why when Moses asks God to give him the name of Him who has sent him to king Pharaoh, God responds: Say that "I am" has sent me (**Ex.3:14-15**). He is the only one who necessarily "is", and each one of us human beings together with the other creation, are just a dot of His everlasting being.

No wonder for astronomers, man is a dot and yet this very dot is still the Astronomer. It is because of this uniqueness of creation that God is more immanent in me than I am in myself. This is why I connect automatically to Him, the Origin of my being and identity. St. Augustine expresses it very well in the words: "*You have created us for you Oh Lord and our hearts are*

*restless until they rest in you*".<sup>4</sup> My being is a participated modality. From the perfection of being: *Actus Purus* (= *pure act*), I am also given an existence. From Him who was, is, and ever will be, I am given a beginning in time, though I was eternally in his plan; that he would create me. He himself says, "*I begot you in your mother's womb before I created you*" (Jer. 1:5).

### **God "Teaches" in All Our Activities**

This intrinsic imprint of my existence is deeply present in all aspects of my activities. *We act what we are*, and since God has made each one of us so unique, we *also act uniquely*. Therefore, also my faith, prayer, joy, love, and journey to Eternity, will also be unique as we are soon to see. No one bears faith for the other, no one loves for the other, or takes the way to Eternity for the other; these are personal activities right at the root of our fundamental options in life. They are like pain. However much one loves me I cannot share pain with him or her. I can only do it with my God who is intrinsically in, with, and through me. Then this gives us a glimpse of why on the Last Day of Judgment each one shall stand alone before the Son of Man. Mother Church already prepares us daily when we pray the Creed and we say *I believe: "Credo!"* Yes, it is a personal identification with the ground of our existence in faith. Though we work together in our communities, each one has a personal stand before the mirror of our ground of existence. God demands of us personal responsibility due to our individual identity given to us at creation.

### **My "Constantly Learning" Brothers and Sisters**

I am the third born of the seven children of our family. The first born is Mary Nakiganda; now Mrs. Mary Kwagala Ssali. She is a very hard working lady. The second born was Stefania Najjemba (R.I.P), then myself. The fourth born is Fr. Emmanuel Kiganda, a man who has and continues to love me deeply and always calls me back to order. The fifth born is Francis Xavier Lusekera, a very faithful married man who is struggling to see his family through. He is also the 'Successor' to our father: Joseph Mutuba Lutaaya. The sixth is Gerald Lutaaya, an industrial artist, married, and has deep love for his children and family. Florence Nassonko, a Teacher by profession, has an excelling gift for the care of the sick especially for our mother. The last born is Felicitas Nawajje, also a professional Teacher, well embedded into the cultural heritage of Buganda, our local Kingdom.

### **Mother Uniquely Loves each One of Us**

Sharing privately with my mother I have come to learn that each one of us was and still is a unique surprise. Not because at that time one could not tell whether it would be a baby girl or boy, but when mother describes each one of us, she even fails to tell whom she loves most of us seven. Yes, "a woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for the joy that a human being has been born into the world" (Jn. 16:21). On the other hand, for each one of us the seven, whoever approaches 'our' mother feels she or he is the most loved! This is the mystery of love.

Perhaps this is why in spiritual matters the two spiritual qualities of motherhood and priesthood are almost identical. As a mother is to all her children so is a priest meant to be to all the people of God; and thus the name *Father* is always accorded to us Priests. In the rite of Ordination, "*that we look at all as our children*", is mentioned as one of the reasons for our chaste Celibacy in the

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<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: The Confessions of St. Augustine, Chap. I.

Catholic Church. This is fundamentally true for it has never been heard of in any culture that a “father has married his daughter”!

I am the first boy child, and thus at my birth my parents and all the clan elders rejoiced for having got the ‘successor’ to my father. A week after my birth, my mother sought advice from the Parish Priest; for she wanted to thank God for her first baby boy. The Priest suggested the name *Deogratias*, which in Latin means “*thanks be to God*”! Here is another act of God’s love for me. I have surprisingly lived a life providentially true to this name till today. I have shared immense love from each of my brothers and sisters. From ‘Mary’ the First Born I have received the first directions of thinking outside the box of the family environment. We were at first at Katongero, Nazareth Parish in the present Rakai District. Then in 1970 we shifted to Matala – Kalisizo, where our family is right now.

## **My Prophetic “Teaching” Parents**

God exhorts us to love father and mother, to the point of making this a Commandment: Ex. 20:12. The parents of my father were Kiwaama and Mukebezi. He had two brothers and two sisters: Steven (R.I.P), Nnyamayalwo (R.I.P, Merciane and Nakirijja, respectively. The two brothers lived in the neighborhood, and the two sisters, still living, were married in Kooki: Kateerero and Mmannya-Kibaale, respectively. There were several other relatives of mine around the village of Katongero.

### **(a) My Father the Fisher Man**

God must have loved me in and with my father, Joseph Mutuba Lutaaya. He was a fisher-man from Lake Victoria, though he would also go for some months to Lake Wamala in Kiyinda-Mityana; also for fishing business. He was a strict man, serious at discipline, though a bit shy. Remember a wise son heeds his father’s instructions (Prov. 13:11). He had several confreres many of whom were his relatives, and in fact when we shifted from Nazareth to Kalisizo he remained for some months behind. Still later, he would now and then go back for some months to our place of origin; since even the land we used to occupy had not been sold because he too had just inherited it from his father Kiwama. You may understand here Jesus’ challenge to the young man who was told to sell all he had and then follow Jesus (Math. 19:21).

When he would come back from fishing, he would send us to take fish to several of his relatives, whom he would later visit for socialization in the evening. He gave me the name: *Ssonkolyabeene*: which means “a precious Ssonko(=Shell) belonging to the Almighty or a Great Chief like the Clan Elder or the King of Buganda”. I was very observant, and I at times would look at him very keenly, a practice about which he would now and again caution me “never to look into the eyes of an elder person for so long”.

Here is a simple rural man, who attended only the first Elementary Classes of School and then began fishing. He loved my mother so much that at times when we would socialize he would sing songs to praise her for her good values. He personally addressed her as *mukyala* (my wife) and when he would be asking us some thing about her he would say *Nnyammwe* to mean “*your mother*”. Joseph Mutuba disciplined us the hard way. He was a *spare-the-rod -and-spoil-the-child* gentleman. He would sometimes admonish, beat us, or give us hard work. It was from him that I found out that in the final analysis, it is not what you do for your children but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings. In fact today

many believe that a lot of what passes for depression these days is nothing more than the body saying that it needs more work. “Chop your own wood, and it will warm you twice” (Henry Ford). My father smoked cigarettes and now and again he would be seen holding one such cigarette, relaxed, and in good mood. He was very clean and smart in almost all aspects of his life. He used to give a portion of his share of food in his plate, when eating, to either my mother or anyone of us who had excelled in the day's responsibilities. He wanted us to wake up very early at Five (5.00 a.m) in the morning. We would then go for water, almost five miles away, and bring it home before we would leave for school.

Although my father hardly paid for our School Fees he was however very anxious to know how well we were performing. He used to either approach our Teachers there where they lived or whenever he met anyone of them he always asked how we were performing at school. Our “studying” was generally an act of pride for him. I remember often the days we went home for holidays and we had been given our End-of-Term Academic Reports. He would leave a message to informing us of where we were to find him in the neighborhood, to bring him those School Reports.

When it came to clothing, my father used to buy a big stretch of cloth from which several clothes for us all were made, and we would be clothed ‘uniformly’. He had a big *shamba* of coffee down the hill of Katongeru, in the neighborhood of river Kagera. We would go together with him for coffee picking and I remember I would in the evening come back with a heavy load of raw coffee in the sack, thus slowly but surely climbing the steep mountain triumphantly back home. There were lots of mosquitoes those days; so many, that I have never seen them anywhere in such amounts! God must have loved me very much since I was not a steady prey to malaria.

### (b) **My Mother A Hardworking Woman**

Honoring father and mother is a commandment with the promise of long life: Eph. 6:1-3. My mother is Betty Nakimera whose matrilineal line involves *Kaheru*, her father, whose parents might have migrated from Bukoba in Tanzania, into Uganda. She is a tall joyful woman, and her early days she was slender; but not anymore now. All in all she is a mother in the true sense of the word.

### (c) **Mother, A Woman of Faith**

My mother is a very prayerful woman who trusts in God through and through. She owes everything to the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Sacred Heart, and then later in her life to the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy and the Uganda Martyrs. Mother has never missed any important national or regional pilgrimage; only that now her legs hardly permit her to do so. She is a hard working lady whose main preoccupation was always to see that we get educated in spite of her meager resources. Most of the money my father got was spent in charity to the poorer families and he just challenged our mother to work harder. He often helped mother in the small scale projects she made: like brewing beer, or making special crop-gardens so that she may get money to educate us.

I remember very often we went with my mother very early in the morning at around Five (5.00 a.m.) for water some good distance in terms of Kilometers far away in the forest. As soon as we

would begin our journey to the well, she would start the Morning Prayers in Luganda referred to as *Ekisinde ky'Okumakya* which in our case also included the reciting of Holy Rosary.

#### (d) **The Sense of Humor in Mother Betty**

My mother used to tell us how she stopped in Primary Three for lack of School Fees; and that she would never allow any one of us to meet the same fate. She can read and write very well in the local language, *Luganda*, and promptly understands some English words and expressions. I remember when she turned 70, and I bought for her a mobile phone. A month after, when I went back to visit her I was very much surprised to hear her say that she had no “air time”. She is a very joyful woman, who is also very observant. She can dramatize practically any issue extraordinarily and normally when we visit her she gives us wonderful summaries of what has happened in any big or interesting event in our home area.

When I reflect on both of my parents I cannot but thank God who in the Scriptures enjoins us: *“Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you”* (Ex 20: 12). *“My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother”* (Prov. 1:8; *“Let your father and your mother be glad, And let her who bore you rejoice”* (Prov. 23: 25).

#### **My Grand Parents**

It is true that *grandparents hold our tiny hands for just a little while, but they do hold our hearts forever*. There are several of them, but I will here present only the three who had the biggest impact on my life: Felicitas Nnalubowa, Joseph Ssebowo and Grand Mother Mukebezi.

*Felicitas Nalubowa* is my maternal Grand Mother. Here is an admirably loving and joyful woman of faith. She had four daughters, my mother being the eldest. These four loved each other and their mother very extra-ordinarily. One could hardly tell which children belonged to whom. This love was also passed on to us their children such that up to now we call them the same name “mother”. Each one of them was blessed with Holy Matrimony. One of them, my mother, went for marriage to Nazareth, while two of them went to Kisaka on Mutukula-Kyotera road. The last born went to Kooki, Kassabukengere, where she also got married!

It is such a “grand thing” to be a mother of the mother of someone – I think that is why the English-world calls such a person “**grandmother**”. This *Felicitas*, my own grandmother, was a special woman in many aspects; especially to us grand-children. No wonder, some say that *Grandmothers are just antique little girls; “A grandmother is a babysitter who watches the kids instead of the television”*.



Felicitas was a great instructor in discipline, hard work, common-sense, and above all in matters with regard to the Catholic Faith. This is a woman who would courageously walk 16 kilometers to go for Sunday (High) Mass which started at 6.30 a.m. She would stand in front of the Church waiting to see her daughter, my mother, so that they could enter and seat together with her in Church. Both enjoyed the Latin Language at Mass. Nalubowa would sing both the *Gloria* and the *Creed (Missa de Angelis no. 8)* by heart. It was only after I had learnt the Latin Language that I discovered how poorly she had always pronounced many of the Latin words. The waves of her joy and faith are till today being felt and seen in most of her descendants.

### **Joseph Ssebbowa**

My other Great Grand Parent is Joseph Ssebbowa (R.I.P). He was the bridge in the family and he belonged to the leopard clan. He was a brother to Felicitas Nalubowa who had died several years before him, and in her absence this Grand Parent Ssebbowa proved to be our great source of inspiration, advice, and joy. It is true, nobody can out-do for little children what grandparents do. Grandparents sprinkle stardust over the lives of their grand children.

Mr. Ssebbowa was always focused and though he had never gone to school, he had some polished command of English. One of his famous mottos was: “*Time is Money*”. At various times he held some different leadership positions at the local village level. He would take time to visit all of us his grand children. In case of any dispute he would listen very attentively to all sides before giving his final impeccable ‘sentence’!

### **Mukebezi**

My last great Grand Parent to be discussed here is Grand Mother Mukebezi. This is my paternal Grandmother. She loved me beyond words. It is from her that I learnt the fact that a grandparent may be old on the outside while still very young inside. She had difficulties with her eye-cataracts, *ensenke*, in the Luganda Language. I remember staying with her for almost two years, and later I would come now and then to visit her from Kateerero. She would greatly empower me whenever she would call me using the local word *mwami*, which means, ‘my husband’ in English. In the cultural context of the Baganda it is normal for Grandmothers to customally refer to their grand children as “husband”. I already by then felt that she really valued me, unlike others who would just look down on me as a minor and set out to treat me accordingly!

Grandma Mukebezi taught me how to dig and how to carefully spare money and food. We would never throw away any left-overs. She made sure we would keep it for the next day or occasion. We cultivated cassava, sorghum, sugar-canes; and one day she even took me to visit the magnificent palace of the *Kamuswaga*, the cultural leader of the ethnic group of people called *Bakooki*. She would listen to a hot argument and then courageously manage to keep quiet! After some weeks she would come back to the same issues and analyze them critically and then wisely give me her mind privately without breathing a word to those who were actually involved in the dispute.

Grandma loved me so much that she even gave me some two names: *Kirongozi* and *Kiwaama*, which were the very names of her own father. I think this was because my father, who was her brother, had succeeded their father (*Kiwaama*); and here was I, also being thought to be the Successor to my own father! That was as far as human love could go. The Everlasting Love of God, from whom I descend in eternity, had other plans for me: TO BECOME A PRIEST. My childhood memories are always revitalized whenever I visit this area, with the wonderful mountains similar to those of Cape Town in South Africa or those of Upper Austria in Europe. Having shared with many others about the beauty of a Grand Parent, I have always felt that they are so special to us perhaps because we see them as old, but loving, and as wise as we think God is then!

### **Studying at a Protestant School**

At Kateerero Protestant Primary School, I learnt smartness and self presentation. I remember we would go Debating without even understanding what we were talking about. There were simple Motions like, “Water is more important than fire”, “A Doctor is more important than a Teacher”, etc. Teachers would write for us on paper, information regarding how we would greet the Chairman and the Assembly. We would then proceed to give the reasons for the side we were supporting. This trained me into future public communication and self-presentation! Till today, I do spare some time to visit these precious communities and some of their families are part of our Program called: Maria Antonio Children and Women Foundation (MACWOF).

### **Two Great Masters Prior to My Seminary Life**

In between this graciousness we had been earlier blessed with the presence of a uniquely holy and charitable man of God in the names of Monsignor Lawrence Jjumba. In him one learns that love is a virtue of the heart and not of the hands. For him, charity does not focus on the cause but on the need. The care exhibited by him shows that the measure of life is not only duration but also a donation. As a young Priest he instructed my mother in Catechism locally called *Mugigi*, at Nazareth Parish. My mother informed him that she herself as a young girl had wanted to join Religious Life, but due to lack of School Fees, she had failed. Monsignor Jjumba encouraged her to persevere in discipline and to trust in Divine Providence. He predicted that *God would give her a Priest or a Religious Sister in her marriage.*

Monsignor Lawrence Jjumba has remained a spiritual pillar and guide of our family till today. I do not remember ever gathering at home as a family and hold any 10 minute-conversation without mentioning his name. Later during my formation in the Seminary, I discovered that he was an especially gifted philosopher, historian, herbalist, spiritualist and a great theologian of the Church. He has a special love for Mother Mary; to the extent of at times being misunderstood. Mons. Jjumba is such a unique Priest that whoever stays with him soon feels that he or she is the most beloved and most cared for.



Msgr. Lawrence has a strong virtue of listening to some one and then later give his sharp, strong, serious but lovely opinion, which by divine grace one would feel compelled to take. I love his simple way of life, his graciousness, his seriousness, calmness, deep understanding of divine and ecclesial matters. He loves sports, the promotion of vocations, support for marriages, education of poor children, the spirit of poverty, and is a real **positive thinker**. In all the years I have come to know Mons. L.M. Jjumba, I can only compare him to Bishop Adrian Kivumbi Ddungu (R.I.P), and “one of most precious memories” Blessed Pope John Paul II.

### **A Head Teacher Who Trained Us the Hard Way**

I completed my Primary Seven at Biikira Primary School while staying at the home of Mr. Paul Kavuma who was then the Head Teacher of that school. His wife was also a teacher. Here I met another young man Vincent Sserubiri who was in Primary Five when I was in Primary Seven. Both of us were subjected to hard and beneficial manual labor, and thank God we are both now Priests. Sserubiri was ordained for Masaka Diocese while I am incardinated in Kampala Archdiocese. In the end I have come to learn among other things that it is not the years in my life that count but the life in them. One of the observations I wish to make here is that during these years I was very curious and I always wanted to know things as they were. No wonder, if you wish to study men you must not neglect to mix with the society of children.

Many people loved me and I have often received many gifts from my family members, at School, as well as from the village community. Till today I still believe that each one of those persons I have met or worked with during these past years, still loves me for what I am above all else: Surely, God must have loved me!

# Chapter II

## Seminary Formation

### My Seminary Alma Mater(s)

God must have loved me throughout my Seminary formation. A Seminary is a place and period of formation to the Holy Priesthood. So, my 'true love' experiences will at times involve holidays. I joined Bukalasa Seminary in 1975. Right in the Seminary Chapel Sanctuary one reads the words: "*Magister adest et vocat te!*" These are Latin words which mean, "The Master is here and He is calling you". We enjoyed the beauty and quality of formation here. This is the first Minor Seminary in Uganda (19...)? It was at this place of formation that for the first time I wore long-trousers. Some of my classmates who also later became Priests are: Fr.Peter Bakka, Fr.Joseph Ssemwanga, Fr.Raphael Ssemmanda, Fr.Augustine Ntabana, Fr.John Fisher Kiyimba, Fr. Romanus Kyomya, Father Katende (Holy Cross Fathers), Father Muddu Toogo (Spiritans Fathers), Fr.Peter Ssenkaayi, Fr.Aloys Bunnya, Fr.Joseph Sserunjogi, Fr.Rusticus Lubega (R.I.P.), Fr.Evarist Lubega (R.I.P.) and Father Ssenyomo (R.I.P.) etc. We all liked the Seminary especially for the joy which we experienced while there. Quality at times means "Doing things right, even when no one is seeing"; but the majority of us then were most of the time the usual *ad oculos* (= doing things in order to be seen) boys!

After my Ordinary Level Exams in 1978, I began an intensive search for the possibility to join a Major Seminary. I had already applied to St. Thomas Aquinas Katigongo Major Seminary; just in the neighborhood of the Minor Seminary Bukalasa. Then I also attended an orientation course by the Comboni Missionaries in Northern Uganda held at Alokolum National Major Seminary premises. It lasted for one month. I had applied to the Apostles of Jesus, but had neither gone for a Course nor for the Interviews. In the mean-time I also went to St. Mbaaga Seminary for the interviews. I remember that day! It was constantly raining heavily. When I reached the Taxi Park in Kampala, there were no Taxes to Ggaba; so I walked on foot from the Tax Car Park in Kampala, all the way to Ggaba Seminary.

All along in my prayers, I promised God that in all these Interviews and Courses I was engaged in, I would go where they would call me first. Divine Providence prepared it in such a way that soon after the Interviews at St. Mbaaga Major Seminary in the morning, we were on the same day in the After-noon informed of our results. I was one of those admitted to join the Major Seminary. I was so excited that again this time I found myself walking on foot, and covering that stretch of seven miles to the Kampala Old Taxi Car Park without even noticing the actual length of the journey.

17<sup>th</sup> May 1979, was the D-Day when I joined St. Mbaaga Major Seminary. This was the Fourth Year of the Seminary's Recruitment since its foundation as a Diocesan Major Seminary (The first and so far the only one of the kind in Uganda), by the late Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga. I enjoyed this *Alma Mater* from the very first day of my entry till the day of my exit in 1987. In spite of all that was still lacking at its initial stages e.g. the Staff Members, money, infra structures etc; we always felt at home. Here was I with my first two years of experience at the Minor Seminary, which had armed me with some Music, some Latin and some Seminary basics.

### **Spiritual Life Formation**

My Spiritual Director at the Minor Seminary was Fr. Dominic Kateregga, now a Monsignor, and the General Spiritual Director of the same Seminary. I can hardly remember anything about what was said to us during the Spiritual Talks of those days. One particular thing I used to do was to pray the Rosary, sometimes near and other times inside the Chapel of Mother Mary at the Main Entrance Gate into Bukalasa Seminary. We would wake up very early in the morning and go to the Seminary Chapel for Morning Prayers which would be followed by Holy Mass. One thing I remember very vividly of the Seminary Chapel are the words referred to earlier on the wall in the Sanctuary: "*Magister Adest et Vocat Te*". Latin words which in English mean, "The Master is here and he is calling you". I would at times whisper to Him (The Master) in the Chapel while facing the Tabernacle: "*Lord if you are calling me, make me suitable for the call!*"

In the Major Seminary, the spiritual life-program was not very different from that of the Minor Seminary. After some weeks we were vested in White Cassocks. I then felt my self nearer to becoming a Priest than ever before. I compared my self to those first Priests I saw in my life wearing cassocks in Nazareth Parish. It was quite a show and we enthusiastically took several photographs. As I read several spiritual books from our Seminary Library in those early days, two particular spiritual writers impressed me most: Pope John Paul II, and Archbishop Joseph Fulton Sheen. I made up my mind to read whatever had been written by both of them.

With Fulton Sheen, I always used to find it hard to lay down any one of his books before finishing it. I think I must have read almost all his books during my Seminary life. Later, I was privileged to get some of his tapes from the USA. I was introduced to this great spiritual writer by Steven Nyanzi who is now also a Priest. I am very grateful to him because when he was chosen to go to Urbaniana College in Rome for further studies, he donated to me the gift of a booklet: *The Wits and Wisdom of Archbishop Fulton Sheen*. This started the whole story between myself and the writings of this great man of God.

In the Major Seminary my two special Spiritual Directors were: Fr. Masagazi (R.I.P), and Mons. William Mpuuga. When he was transferred, I switched over to Fr. Godfrey Kyeyune. We would meet regularly.

I must admit that not even in the Major Seminary was the identity and role of a Spiritual Director clear to me! I have taught for 14 years in the Major Seminary and have also been a Spiritual Director to many Seminarians, but to me the question still remains unanswered. Most likely, even today; Seminarians tend to turn Spiritual Directors into their special ‘Social Consultants’. They help them “to know what the Staff Members think about them and how to cope with the general atmosphere of the Seminary”. Then their ‘real’ Spiritual Directors in the strictest sense of the word happen to be their fellow students. The reasons are many, and too various to be discussed here.

### **Seminary Discipline**

Discipline has something to do with *discipulus*: disciple. One who follows the way of the Master. Imagine *Deogratias*, a rural small boy from all those experiences of the mountains and in his various ‘*mission caritatis*’, now finding himself in the *muros* (= walls) of the Seminary. At the Minor Seminary one of the Staff Members whom I remember to be very serious at discipline was Fr. Henry Kyabukasa. He gives a sense of a high intuitive presence. He gradually brought to our awareness that automatic sense of self-critique and worth. He would just look at you and you would automatically be led to serious self-evaluation. He would almost use the same red-hot charcoal as the one applied on Isaiah’s mouth to cleanse a student’s mouth so as to enable him to get the right British English accent. He also ably taught us the Subjects of History and English. Even his Luganda accent, up till now, blends naturally with the Queen’s – the Queen of England, of course!

In 1976, at the end of Senior Two at Bukalasa Minor Seminary, 40 of us were advised to pack up and leave, because of talking in the Dormitory during the great *Silentium Magnum*! This is the time after Evening Study and before Lights-Out at night. In my case I had been caught talking because I was then looking for my one pair of trousers, which I had exposed outside in the sunshine, but could not find anywhere in the evening. This was one of the most miserable days in my life! I left for home shattered into pieces! I was all along the way wondering as to what words I would use to address my mother, let alone Monsignor Lawrence M. Jjumba, who had brought me to the Seminary. I did not believe I could be dismissed for just looking for my cloths! Neither did I think anybody could believe my story!!!

Only God knows how exactly I went through those days of dismissal from Bukalasa Minor Seminary. Any way I soon joined St. Joseph College School of the Bannakaroli Brothers of Kiteteredde in Biikira Parish, Masaka Diocese. There I managed to complete my Secondary School Education.

At St. Joseph’s I met two special persons in my life, Brother-Father Gyaviira (R.I.P) and Brother Father Anattooli Wasswa. The latter has since then been one of my mentors and close friend till today. He encouraged me at my new school to continue serving Mass daily. He explained to me

that if I still cherished the idea of one day becoming a Priest, this practice of serving Mass daily would help keep my vocation to the Priesthood burning.

One of my best friends from this new school of St. Joseph's Technical College is Mr. Robert Ssempe. He is the former Head of the Laity (Locally known as *Ssabakristu*) in the Archdiocese of Kampala. He continues to be a very strategic and compelling friend of mine from the good old days till today's 'fantastic new precious days'. I remember him as one of the ring-leaders of a strike that we made as a school, against the Biikira Girl's Secondary School in the neighborhood.

After St. Joseph's College School, as indicated earlier, I joined the Seminary once again. In the Major Seminary of Ggaba St. Mbaaga, 'discipline' also involved the famous Great Silence (*Silentium Magnum*), which had caused my dismissal from Bukalasa Minor Seminary. Add to this also, outing only with permission, punctuality, speaking the English language in season and out of season, Team Work, and respect for all. God must have loved me! I did fail several times to observe some moments of the Great Silence, and also I did fail now and again in observing the directive of speaking English, plus several others. It was only when I became Head Prefect and was in charge of all my confreres that I understood what it meant deep down to observe Seminary rules and laws.

### **Academic Life**

At the Minor Seminary I remember performing very well in Sciences, but I was poor at Arts Subjects. The reason was that some of the names in History, such as the ones of some of the kingdoms in West Africa, sounded very funny and far distant in time and space. Fr. Mukasa would assiduously lead us into the Biology and Chemistry experiments in the Science Laboratory. Among our Seminary elders I remember three great academicians: Walugembe who also was a very good Piano player, Nsubuga Birekeraawo Mathias, who was our Head Prefect (Currently he joined the ranks of M.P.s and is the General Secretary of the Democratic Party in the Republic of Uganda) and Matovu John Major, who was very smart and very academic.

Among my Bukalasa Classmates, Bakka Peter and Raphael Ssemmanda seemed exceptional in reading books during almost all their every free time. Bakka would read big Volumes of novels which I personally even feared to hold in my hands! No wonder Fr. Peter Bakka has turned out to be such a brilliant Priest even long after his Ordination to the Priesthood, so much so that he even made a Local Library in the centre of Masaka Town, which he gave a unique Ganda name: *Kitabiro!*

At Bukalasa Minor Seminary I really enjoyed all the Science Subjects and I remember working with Peter Luswata who was one year ahead of us. He hailed from my home Parish of Matale. I frequented him whenever I wanted to solve a tough number or a serious question. By the end of Senior Two I had completed solving all the numbers in the Text Book called *Ordinary Level Physics*, by Abbot!

At the Major Seminary I enjoyed almost every Subject offered there. We used to study in groups especially during revisions in preparation for the Exams. I enjoyed at most four Subjects: Logic, for its nature, Metaphysics for what it is and for its Teacher, Liturgy for its Teacher and Christology for its nature and its Teacher. I used to read a lot just for general information and for love of my vocation. I remember reading many Theological books when I was still in my initiation year before even beginning the study of Philosophy. I remember always preparing myself very well for the Exams and in almost all the Exams I did at the Major Seminary I would always finish much earlier than the designated time.

We had a thrilling Academic Dean, Fr. Dr. Lawrence Kanyike. We liked his character, structure, joy, support, intelligence and above all his American accent. I remember one time during one of his talks asking him: “*For how long should we wait for a late Staff Member for lessons in Class?*” We wanted to be given some specific time, so that if a Staff Member exceeded that time, we would go out of the Classroom and head for the Library or for our bed-rooms. But to our surprise he answered: “*You must wait for him until he comes*”. Thank God I did perform better in Philosophy than in Theology. God must surely have loved me!

### **Liturgy and Music Formation**

I must admit that I am a gifted person in this field and that I like both Liturgy and Music. At the Minor Seminary, one of the most impressing Staff Members in Liturgy and Music was Fr. Ssettuma Benedict (R.I.P). He had glaring eyes with a smile and he could almost see through you. With his long pipe which he smoked, he spoke English with a BBC Accent while teaching us Music and Latin.

Fr. Benedict introduced me to Piano- and Horn-playing. He would move the whole assembly of spectators whenever he conducted the Seminary Brass Band. This was an opportunity for us to be invited on several Diocesan and Government events. One of the highest such events at Bukalasa in this line was my singing of the *Suscipe Domine* by St. Ignatius of Loyola at Mass on one of the Diocesan events in Kitovu Cathedral. I had a wonderful Soprano voice then. This was one of the greatest moments in my entire life.

At the Major Seminary God loved us so much that we had Monsignor William Mpuuga (R.I.P) as our Teacher; plus his colleague Mons. Dr. David Kyeyune, then the Pastoral Coordinator of the Archdiocese of Kampala and Chaplain at the National University Makerere at the same time. These two men I did my best to understand through and through! They were gifted in both Liturgy and Music, besides other Subjects.

Mons. William Mpuuga used to often read this statement to us: “*Liturgy should be ranked among the Major Subjects taught in the Seminary*”. For this he wanted a translation. And the only translation he gave was: “*A Seminarian who neither knows nor loves Liturgy should be dismissed at once.*”



I must admit that not even at our Catholic University of St. Anselm in Rome did, I ever find men so “liturgical” as Mons. Dr. David Kyeyune, and Mons. Mpuuga. They introduced us into Liturgy as a Paschal Mystery and the highest act of the Church at that. On Saturdays he would visit us during our Catechism Instructions in the various places in the Diocese where he had appointed us.

Regarding Music, I used my introductory knowledge to Music from the Minor Seminary and I hugely enjoyed my Music Classes at St. Mbaaga. I performed as one of the Seminary Organists from the beginning until the time I left the Seminary. During the time for Country Walks on Sundays, I would myself remain behind to enjoy Piano and Harmonium playing. Our Church music “Singing Practices” were always very lively, though we used to have them at a very difficult time i.e. At Three in the After Noon. Many of us would have preferred to be in bed for a nap at this time!

### **Extra-Curricular Activities**

At the Minor Seminary, my basic Sports Game was soccer; for it was because of soccer that I had entered the Seminary as illustrated earlier. Here we had Fr. Boniface Mubiru (R.I.P) who originated from my home Parish of St. Joseph Matala. He introduced us into the world of Latin, Scouting and Soccer playing. He had a special love for all in students who liked any one of the above activities. He also had some special love for those Seminarians from his Home Parish and those whose names were similar to any one of the old Priests he knew. Fr. Boniface always wore his cassock, even during Scouts’ camping. He was the only Staff Member who had a Television set in his room, and the only one Set at the Seminary; so many of us would after Supper flock to his room for a TV watch.

At the Major Seminary Ggaba I joined and did participate in the activities of almost all the Clubs there: Sports, Drama, Scouting, Languages, Legionary of Mary, and the Debating Club. In Sports I enjoyed soccer and I played Number Seven. In Drama and academic debates or seminars, we were highly empowered by Deacon Zziwa Joseph Anthony, the present Bishop of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese. Here was a deacon who was very friendly, very academic, social but a very serious formator. He meant giving back to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God! The Language Club has now three sections: The Italian Section, French and then later was added the German one. The latter was founded by me when I came back from Germany in 1990. This was my first trip to Europe.

As a Legionary, I enjoyed mostly the out-door functions. In the Debating Club we were empowered by our very active Deacon: Joseph A. Zziwa. It was with him that we prepared the very first “*Quasi* Mini-Symposium” at the Seminary.

### **Team Work Formation**

In the Minor Seminary, team work was obvious in things like Manual Labor, Scouting, and Soccer. I do not remember having seen much team work among the Staff Members, perhaps because it was not an issue that occupied my mind then.

In the Major Seminary however we had a very dedicated and hard working Rector in the names of Fr. John Baptist Kaggwa, the present Bishop of Masaka Diocese. He was a father to us all. He cultivated in us the spirit of voluntary service. Whenever there was work to be done, we would just come up spontaneously and finish it at once before going back to our private business.

At one particular time Fr. J.B. Kaggwa was: the Rector, the Vocations' Director in the Archdiocese of Kampala, the Parish Priest of Ggaba, and at the same time the Bursar at the Seminary. Fr. John Baptist Kaggwa then managed all this because of his dedicated service and the team-work ethic behind it all: backed by all the Staff Members and Students.

The Vice Rector, Fr. Steven Mukasa (R.I.P) impressed us in his love for the Catholic Church and the possible dangers from those who broke away from it. Fr. Masagazi (R.I.P) a Canon Law teacher demanded for strict diplomacy, Mons. William Mpuuga (R.I.P) always called for *doxa* (= *glory to God*) and correct Liturgical formation and celebration.

Mons. Charles M. Kimbowa was our second Rector whose constant catch-words of formation were, "*Sentire cum Ecclesia*". He was very observant, and gave well prepared talks as Rector. Here is a very good Teacher of Moral Theology, to us Seminarians, Mons. Kimbowa also soon proved himself to be very sharp at reasoning. We all loved him very much as a Seminary. I am privileged to indicate here that he loved me in particular, and I loved him in a very special way up till today. I later discovered that besides being both of us of the same clan, his father was also called "Ssonko" i.e. My name sake. He was the one in fact who preached at my first Thanksgiving Holy Mass at my home! He is pleasing to stay with.

I have by now taught in both Minor and Major Seminaries, both regional and national. If the present Seminaries were to have that same spirit of team work and team building as we had then at St. Mbaaga, they would have been better 'families' and better 'places' of formation.

## **Holidays**

When I joined Kampala Archdiocese in the Major Seminary at Ggaba the Vocations' Director, Fr. J.B. Kaggwa, gave me a Home Parish in the Archdiocese. At first this was Busuubizi Parish in the present day Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese. Here, I found three very interesting priests in my life. These were Fr. Paul Muganga the Parish Priest, Fr. Basil Katabi the Chaplain at the Teacher Training College and a young Priest by the name of Fr. Joseph Mukasa Nkeera, the Curate. Fr. Muganga resonated the beauty of Church and secular music, Fr. Katabi excelled in his Theological mind and his moving touch at the pulpit, while Fr. Nkeera was a silent but very intelligent man who at times would summarize the views of all the arguments of the day into



some practical synthesis. As a Seminarian I supported whichever side came my way; other wise what else would I have done!

Time came when in 1981 Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese was created and Busubizi was no longer part of the Archdiocese. Then I was transferred to Nabbingo Parish as my new Home Parish. Here for the first time I met Fr. Joseph Njala (now Mons. Njala,) who was as always, a very kind, very understanding, and very hard working Priest. He lived together with the then Chaplain of Trinity College Nabbingo, Fr. Joseph Kakooza, who later became the Chancellor of the Archdiocese.

### **My All in All “Silver” Experience in the Teaching Ministry**

Often our Instructions in the faith begin at an early age: Catechism Instruction, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, etc. In these past years of my Priestly Ministry, I must confess, I have not yet grasped fully what the Mystery of Faith is exactly! It is a *misterium fascinantis* (=A fascinating mystery). On the other hand, since faith is a gift that is God-given, no Priest or Religious can give genuine reasons for not having it. Given our background in the Novitiate, in the Seminaries plus our very style of life; we are meant to be people of faith.

In my past 25 years as a Priest, I have come to learn that people automatically rely on us, on our faith, on our ‘assumed presence’ before the Almighty on their behalf. But how can we bring their sorrows and joys, sacrifices and praise to Him whom we do not see internally? It is faith that connects us directly to the Divine Satellite! What a disappointment it would be to show them that we also are not connected! Brother-Father Anattooli Wasswa puts it succinctly when he asks, “What will follow then *if the Break-down itself breaks down?*” This is why the simple consciences of our people the Faithful, who are the majority, may not understand it when they see their Priest sitting with them in the assembly during the Sacrifice of Holy Mass. They expect every Priest during Holy Mass to always be fully vested and concelebrating as an Ordained Priest at the altar.

In preaching the word of God, I have sometimes made some fantastic homilies, but I have at times also made some poor ones as well. All in all however, whenever I have had the opportunity to prepare my Homilies or Sermons in faith; especially before the Blessed Sacrament on my knees, those Homilies have been unique to the assembly. I would often afterwards receive Penitents in need of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sometimes these have been people who had spent over 20 years not receiving Holy Communion. They would now fully come back to the Lord, after hearing an inspiring Homily.

I remember very well such favorable times as I had at the Parish of my first appointment. How well I used to prepare my Catechism Classes! Until today the Christians, who by then were children, whom I instructed then, do remind me of their happy memories of my moving talks. These include Sr. Nakabugo GSS and Fr..... of Kasana Luwero Diocese. Yes, it is amazing to see

that whenever I prepared in faith, people would come to thank me and even at times ask for a copy of my homily.

I had a tough experience at Holy Name Parish in Kansas City, USA. My first Sunday Homily there was not well prepared. At the end of the Mass, the practice there is for both the Main Celebrant together with all the Mass Servers to stand in front of the Main Entrance of the Church and greet the Faithful as they go out. One lady said to me on that day, “Hope you will be better prepared next Sunday Father.” Many others did not comment but I could see that they had not appreciated my work that day.

That very Sunday in the After-noon, I came back to Church and in prayer began preparing for the next Sunday Homily. They loved it very much and I was happy. I tried to keep up the standard. In many parts of Europe and Uganda, East Africa, people often thank us Priests for both poor and good Homilies through clapping. Hence our not being challenged enough. A big leaf should be borrowed in this regard from America.

One fascinating fact about our faith in preaching the Word of God is that the more you go deep into God’s reality through meditation, the more you meet all humanity at its best! Br.Fr. Anattooli Wasswa, one of my most cherished mentors convinced me that in preparing any good Sermon or Homily we ought not to focus on whether the people we are to address are rural or urban, educated or illiterate, rich or poor... We just have to prepare to break the Good News to them as God’s people; just like one would announce the death of a person. Your duty is just to announce the ‘fact’ in the same manner that Radio Announcers report that “so and so is dead”. Each class of people easily finds its own way of reacting to the sad news of the deceased!

The Ministry of preaching the Word of God in faith is until today a very big challenge. I strive to live up to this challenge every day. The principle behind is: One always delivers in the Homily, less than what one prepares. The people normally understand less than what is delivered, and they usually will put still less in practice than what they have understood. Another friend of mine Fr. Eugen (OSB) once told me that always in a good Homily, “*The less the better*”, and that “*less is always more*”!

# PART TWO:

## The Sanctifying) Ministry

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### Chapter III

#### Priesthood and Sanctity

##### **Liturgy as a Celebration of my very Identity**

In Liturgical worship we speak of the ‘two movements of liturgy’. The first movement is upwards; that is the worship humanity gives to God. This is communal. The other movement is downwards: God sanctifies humanity from the Worship given Him. This down-ward movement of sanctification is given to each individual according to one’s inner disposition. The Vatican II Document on Liturgy therefore reminds us: *“Let them come to it (Liturgy) with proper disposition, that their words match their thoughts lest they celebrate it in vain”* (SC 11, 14). Other way said: *“In qualifying us to eternity, in Heaven God goes back to His Unique identity in us”*. Moreover, even our very creation was meant to know, love, and serve Him, and then lastly, praise Him in Heaven.

##### **Soccer Opens my Heart for “Priesthood”**

At home and at school we used to very much enjoy soccer, whose balls would easily be made out of banana-fiber. Oftentimes such balls would last just for a day. I loved soccer so much that I can confidently say that my going to the Seminary was provoked by this soccer.

It happened that at school we were denied the opportunity of using rubber-balls because such a privilege was always reserved to the big boys only; those in the Upper Classes in our School. One day at Nazareth Primary School, there came a young joyful Priest called Fr. Boniface Ssemaganda (Mons. Boniface Ssemaganda, who was, until very recently, working in Umtata Diocese, in South Africa). He came and greeted us during Break Time at school. He asked us as to what we preferred to do with him at the time, and we unanimously suggested playing the precious rubber-ball with him; to which he at once consented.

After Lunch, almost one hundred of us joined Fr. Boniface in the play-ground for soccer, using the cherished rubber-ball. This was my first time to kick this lovely round thing with my own feet, and I was very much excited!!!

All along, the Priests that I had seen before the appearance of Fr. Ssemaganda were old men, always dressed in black cassocks, and often to be seen moving around the Church compound with

their Breviaries or Rosaries. So, I had silently concluded that all Priests had to be secluded men and that one had to wait until one reached old age, if one were to be allowed to become a Priest; but Fr. Ssemaganda Bonaventure suddenly opened my eyes.

After that personal encounter with Fr. Ssemaganda and the rubber-ball, as soon as I returned back home, I told my mother at once that I too wanted to become a Priest, so that when I find children who have no chance of playing rubber-soccer I can buy one for them; and that I would then play together with them. In fact after my Ordination to the Priesthood I did buy many rubber-soccer-balls and did supply them to many rural children, especially those in Luweero and Masaka area. I did this for several years. In fact earlier, as a Major Seminarian studying at Ggaba Seminary, I also liked soccer very much and did play even in one of Uganda's National Teams: Nsambya Football Club.

### **The Curious Mass Server**

Soon I became a serious Mass Server with the intention of preparing myself for the Seminary. In this Ministry, two things remained a mystery to me: the white smoke from incense, and the Consecrated Hosts! With the white smoke I always felt as if God were descending down upon the whole Church. Consecration was a very thrilling moment for me. Why? I would see the Priest raise one big Host at Consecration but during the distribution of Holy Communion, I would see many small Hosts being given out. I thought that through the mysterious Act of Consecration, at which the mighty Priest held the Host high up, the one Big Host turned into several smaller ones immediately afterwards!!! I used to silently tremble whenever I assisted at this impressive mystery!

The friendship of the Priests at our Parish then, especially Fr. Ssemaganda, and later, Fr. Mayanja, Fr. Anania, etc. was something I enjoyed hugely. Add to this the acquaintance of Sisters: The Daughters of Mother Mary Bwanda, who had a Convent at Nazareth Parish. All along, I had noticed that our Teachers who were "learned" wore shoes, and some even had spectacles! I was performing very well in Class, but I had the impression that if I too were to have shoes on and spectacles as well, I would automatically be far wiser.

After becoming a Mass Server I did get the chance to wear shoes, which we would find put aside for us in the Sacristy; to be used only during Holy Mass celebration. As for the spectacles, I never got the chance to get a pair on, till at a later date after my Ordination to the Priesthood. It was no longer a 'chance' then, but as a result of an eye defect!

I soon proved a joyful and smart Mass Server; so much so that the Parish Priest eventually asked me to come and live in the Parish. My parents were very happy to see that I had come to live nearer to God! I used to visit the Sisters and almost everyone around the hill on which the Parish Church sat. I had better opportunities of both playing the 'famous' soccer rubber-ball in addition to serving Mass. There, at that age, it is interesting to note, eating mangoes, jack fruits, sugar

canes, singing, etc., were more important activities for me than studies.

### **From “Common Priesthood” to “Ministerial Priesthood”**

There were Nine of us installed Acolytes and Lectors in Lubaga Cathedral in 1985. In the same Mass were celebrated also the Holy Orders to the Diaconate and Priesthood. Poor me! I focused more on those being “Ordained” than on what I was becoming myself. After the ceremonies, our “Formator”, Mons. William Mpuuga boosted our morale very much when he said: “You are now the Official Lectors of the Church of Kampala Archdiocese”. But still for me, I continued seeing myself as one merely put on only a surprise step; not far different from other Seminarians or Catechists: no Stole, no Cincture etc! However the value of these two Ministries was made still clearer to me by Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala: “They are necessary gradual steps to the Holy Orders”, he said one time when he visited us at the Seminary.

### **My First Steps to the Holy Orders**

There are steps in the Catholic Church through which you pass to become a priest. After getting installed as an Acolyte and Lector, you then get ordained a deacon before you get the sacrament of Holy Orders to become a full priest.

There were nine of us installed Acolytes and Lectors<sup>5</sup> in the Archdiocesan Sacred Heart Cathedral, Lubaga. In the same Mass, some deacons were being given the sacrament of Holy Orders to become priests of the Lord. Poor me! I focused more on those being ordained priests than on what I was becoming myself. After the ceremonies, one of the priests boosted our morale very much when he said: “You are now the official Lectors of the Church of Kampala Archdiocese”. But still, for me, I continued seeing myself as, merely put – not a surprise step; not far different from other seminarians or catechists: no stole, no cincture<sup>6</sup> etc. However the value of these two ministries was made still clearer to me by Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala: “They are necessary gradual steps to the Holy Orders”, he said one time, when he visited us at the Seminary. Our ordination to the diaconate was on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1987. After the liturgical celebrations at Lubaga Cathedral, we joyfully went home at Kalisizo. That was the first time I saw lighted electric bulbs in my home village. These were connected to the generator by the disco-men. My mother and all the aunts who had come were full of divine praises. They prayed the Rosary almost throughout the night to thank God for such a great gift of a Deacon in the family. During the Thanks-giving

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<sup>5</sup> These are Church ministries for serving at Holy Mass and Proclaiming the Word of God respectively during Worship.

<sup>6</sup> A stole is one of the worship or liturgical vestments which bishops, priest and deacons puts on. It symbolizes the powers given him by the Church to administer sacraments. A cincture, instead is a kind of fine rope put around the waist of the above ministers partly to tighten the first liturgical vestment called Alb which these ministers put on for liturgical functions. Secondly this rope symbolized the humility of the minister asking God to help him fulfill his promised of chaste life (totally consecrated to God and thus not married).

Holy Mass the next day I proclaimed the Gospel beginning solemnly with the words, *Dominus Vobiscum...* in Latin to mean “The Lord be with you”. I saw one of my dear Aunts smile, because when I was still with her during my early years as Mass Server, I used to sing out such Latin phrases, wishing myself to, one day, become a priest.

The preacher dwelt much on the mystery of Ordination, mostly as an indelible configuration to Christ the High Priest. I then made a few home visits and then prepared to go for Pastoral Work since our seminary formation had come to an end. I remember this was the very year during which St. Mbaaga, the major seminary, shifted from the Term System to the Semester Program!

### **My day of ordination**

If there is a day I remember with great emotion, gratitude, and wonder, it is my ordination day. It was unique, full of high emotions of faith, joy, prayers, anxiety, humiliation, gratitude, fear, and wet eyes! It was here that I reached the pick of understanding my name: *Deo gratias* in Latin: Thanks be to God in English.

This was on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1987.

By the time of our ordination, some of my classmates belonged to Kiyinda Mitaya-Diocese, which had been created in 1981. These are Frs. Josaphat Kasambula and Joseph Kasule (R.I.P). In Kampala Archdiocese I was ordained together with a fellow Deacon, Baleke Peter (R.I.P). On this highest day of my life, I woke up very early at 2.a.m, prayed, took a shower, and vested for departure. I must have disturbed others especially the Deacons-to-be; one of whom I remember is the present Chancellor of the Archdiocese, Fr. Joseph K. Ntuwa. I did not take breakfast for fear it would ‘disturb’ me during the ordination ceremonies.

The principal celebrant and consecrator was Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga, the man of great popularity. One of his close collaborators, describes him: *The Baganda saw in Nsubuga someone who would bring them together, someone who would speak for them and someone they would look up to. And because of his nature, non-segregationist as he was, people of all walks of life, irrespective of their religious or political affiliations, did go to him for consultations and advice. His face resembled that of the princes. This was another source of attraction for the Baganda.*<sup>7</sup>

#### **a) The Entrance Procession**

The cardinal arrived. Here is a man of God who, perhaps more than any one of his generation bishops, helped Ugandans learn how to get along together, in and out of season - which was one

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<sup>7</sup> Charles M. Kimbowa, *Emmanuel Cardinal Kiwanuka Nsubuga Still Live with Us*, Marianum Press Ltd: Kisubi,58.



of the greatest needs of that time. Having greeted all of us, we proceeded in procession: both of us deacons, with our parents, concelebrating priest, friends and the Cathedral choir. I walked solemnly towards the holy Cathedral where I was to be made a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. In fear and trembling I just kept murmuring the procession hymns, one of which was *Beebale Amansi ne Mapeera....* to mean Thanks be to Brother Amans and Father Lourdel, missionaries who brought the Catholic religion to Uganda.

Later people said to me they had waved to me and called me by name, but I do not remember hearing any of one. I was only focused on the holy destination: the Cathedral.

Here was a high heavenly ambient: well prepared for 8 years at the major seminary, just had a week's retreat in complete silence and now, proceeding to be made a holy priest. I must here mention that I have never repeated the consuming sentiments of that procession. It is on this day, during this procession that I felt really that a liturgical procession has an eschatological character: symbolizes that we are a pilgrim Church on earth going to heaven. I also noticed that, for purposes of remaining composed during the procession and the ordination Mass, candidates should speak or interact less with people that very morning.

### **Called by Name**

The ordination ceremony begins when the vocational director calls out the name of the deacon who has been preparing to become a priest. The person must respond: Here I am, to signify his personal readiness and willingness to take on the Divine vocation.

A name is a word or term by which a person or thing is commonly and distinctively known. When my name, Deogratias, was mentioned, it was a thrillingly an emotional moment. I almost responded "here I am" before the caller finished pronouncing my name.

I promptly stood up and, holding my vestments in my hands and, together with my father and mother, proceeded to the sanctuary before the Cardinal. I failed to keep any video recordings of the ritual but I remember very vividly, that the solemnity taught us during the rehearsal was no longer the priority, but the coming forth as soon as possible to meet the Cardinal. At the time of handing me over to the Cardinal, my father was too excited and too brief: "I give him to you your eminence" were his only words.

I have often rediscovered this very voice "Deogratias" in my good moments of silent meditations and during my annual retreats. The more I settle down to hear my name being called during that rite of ordination, the more this gift and mystery of holy priesthood fills me with the same fear as at ordination day. I go back to hear the applauses of that happy liturgical assembly that day. I embrace the tension of my mother and father, brothers and sisters, friends and classmates. Would

you imagine what come to their mind when each of them goes back to that moment now twenty-something years ago? I may guess rightly to imagine them hearing me respond again: “Here I am!” Some say they continue to see me rising and walking straight forward to the Cardinal. How I pray to my loving heavenly Father that I continue to respond “here I am”, rise and walk forward to the sanctuary every morning, every evening till my last yes, rise and walk to the heavenly sanctuary.

### **Prostration in the Sanctuary**

Emotionally, the real mystery began descending upon me when we prostrated to the ground at the singing of the litany of the saints. I felt that I was totally giving up my life to God and the Church. With my eyes closed, prostrating near such a holy man like Cardinal Nsubuga, hundreds of priests, religious, relatives and friends, I felt as if the choral voices were descending upon me. I remember, whispering to God: thank you Lord, thank you!

It was on this day that I admired the beauty of the tone of the litany of the saints chosen by the Cathedral choir. This tone had been used years before, but at this very moment it uplifted me. It was in Latin, which gave it another sacred character. Humanly speaking, I felt, God was hearing every sing note and word because of Latin and the beauty of the tone used. I was in transition from the holy orders of diaconate to the holy orders of priesthood. I felt the whole of heaven was caring for me, asking God to have mercy on me together with my fellow candidate!

### **The Prayer of Consecration**

On rising from the ground, the Cardinal imposed his hands upon us and other concelebrating priest followed. Whoever finished the imposition of hands remained holding his hand up till all had done the imposition. The gesture of imposition of hands means the calling upon God’s power upon the candidate and it is done in silence. Then the Cardinal, with his two raised hands over us, said the prayer of consecration. I felt particular passion and affection at the following words of the prayer of consecration:

*“Come to our help, Lord, Holy Father, almighty and eternal God; you are the source of every honour and dignity, of all progress and stability. You watch over the growing family of man by your gift of wisdom and your pattern of order ... grant to this servant of yours the dignity of the priesthood. Renew within him the Spirit of holiness. As a co-worker with the order of bishops, may he be faithful to the ministry*



*that he receives from you, Lord God, and be to others a model of right conduct.”*

*(Rite of Ordination of A Priest)*

At the end of this solemn prayer the Commentator exclaimed: “*They are now real priests according to the Order of Melchisedech*”. This was a metaphysical transition, a moment I also dare to call *transubstantiation*!

## **Priesthood and Holy Orders**

I then sank deeper into the Mystery! My personhood, personality and individual identity had been given the eternal and irreversible imprint of Christ: **Holy Orders**. This is a sacred and divine change at the very core of being, like the imprint of personhood on humanity at creation or like the imprint at Baptism. This is why “Once ordained a priest, one is a priest forever. At suspension or laicization<sup>8</sup> from priestly duties, this identity is just kept suppressed in a dormant state; i.e. one does not perform the ordained minister’s duties, but the Holy Orders of his priesthood are his very identity and being! Likewise, with regard to Baptism; when a baptized Christian claims to later become a Moslem, he does not lose this singular imprint of Configuration to Christ.

Here are two wonderful identities in one: Ordination and Priesthood! Which takes over the other? The Holy Orders are a gift and a duty from God. Like all other elements being received, they are received according to the capacity of the recipient: Holy Priesthood. At this moment, the identity of holy priesthood which we received at our baptism, receives official divine duties called Holy Orders. In other words, while priesthood is more of an identity than a duty, Holy Orders are more of a duty than an identity. This is why, the duties of Holy Orders can be called back by the Ordinary or bishop but the identity of priesthood received at baptism remains untouched!

Holy priesthood is always new and fresh in spite of the age of its recipient. Just as humanity and personhood are full and the same in a 100 year old human and in a week-old conceived baby in its mother’s womb. God surely must have loved me, He must have given me all He has, and is, in making me a Roman Catholic Priest. Do not be surprised if I say that being ordained a priest is even higher than being in Heaven. For in Heaven it is to “live with Him”, but at consecration to the priesthood of the Holy Orders, it is **becoming** Christ Himself: *Alter Christus*! At ordination I am not only with him as the saints are in Heaven but “I am Him”.

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<sup>8</sup> At suspension one still remains a cleric or Reverend Father but a laicization one loses this status and is made an ordinary Christian just as he was before he was ordained a priest.

## Investiture

Our brand new vestments were brought, and we were vested newly ordained priests. I had been used to the alb and cincture as a deacon. I saw my stole flow from my shoulders right down to my knees, and no longer across my breast and back as at diaconate. I put on the holy Chasuble<sup>9</sup>, which I had, for years, only prepared for priests. God must have loved me: Here was I putting it on for the first time. I was so uplifted when the Cardinal knelt before us to bless him. This set my heart on the rising high! I remember blessing him “by touch” and then we were congratulated by priests. We were soon seated in the sanctuary of the Cathedral not as a Mass Servers or Deacons on duty, but as a Concelebrating priest.

At Holy Communion, I went first to my parents. My Mother said to me later that she felt as if she were receiving her first and solemn Holy Communion that day. My mother’s eyes were wet at that! It was so moving, so touching that words fail me to outwardly express. Soon, we gave the assembly a blessing, and the Mass concluded.

Coming out of the Cathedral, one lady ran towards me and knelt in front of me saying: “*Bless me Father with your dustless blessing*”, in Luganda, “*Gumpe ogutaliiko kafuufu*. I understood the deep meaning of this sentence a few years later; as a priest when I would at times become “dusty”!

## Sanctus

The *Sanctus*<sup>10</sup>, or Holy was sung in Latin language. I had never understood this hymn of the angels as I did during our ordination Mass. I felt that we the pilgrim Church on earth had joined the heavenly Church to contemplate and praise the holiness of God. *Hosanna* is more inclined to call upon God’s help. Till today, I am not yet comfortable with liturgical assemblies, singing this heavenly hymn with swinging hands. Such holiness being called upon to be ours would just be preparing us to the consecration of the bread and wine to become the most precious Body and Blood of Christ.

## The Consecration of Bread and Wine

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<sup>9</sup> This is normally the last vestments the priest or deacon puts on when vesting for Mass.

<sup>10</sup> "Hosanna" (Greek transcription: ὡσαννά, *hōsanna*) is the cry of praise or adoration shouted in recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus on his entry into Jerusalem, *Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!* It is used in the same way in Christianpraise. Overall, it seems that "Hosanna" is a cry for salvation; while at the same time is a declaration of praise. Therefore, it may be derived that this plea for help is out of an agreeably positive connotation. The old interpretation "Save, now!" which may be a popular etymology, is based on Psalm 118:25 (Hebrew הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא הוֹשִׁיעָה הוֹשִׁיעָה *hOshEeah-nna*) (Possibly "Savior"). This does not fully explain the occurrence of the word in the Gospels, which has given rise to complex discussions. Since 2011 the Roman Missal in English has: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. See: The Order of Mass: Excerpts from the English translation of The Roman Missal © 2010, International Committee on English in the Liturgy

Mother Theresa of Calcutta often exhorted his many admirers: “Celebrate this Mass as if it were your first Mass, the only Mass and the last one.” In the first years of my priesthood I must admit and thank God it was entirely as Mother Theresa would have wished it all to be: I celebrated Mass with reverence, with zeal, love, steadfastness and interior preparation. I must here also ask God for forgiveness for those times that I have not been interiorly well disposed, and rushed through the Mass or even irresponsibly completely omitted celebrating it on some of the days of my priestly life!

Blessed Pope John Paul said that the formula of consecration during Mass is the philosophy of life of a priest: “*To be as bread that is broken and given away for salvation of others. To be that blood in the cup that will be shed for the remission of sins*”.<sup>11</sup> It is impossible to repeat these words of consecration without *feeling oneself caught up in this spiritual movement*. In a certain sense, when he says the words: "take and eat", the priest must learn to apply them also to himself, and to say them with truth and generosity. If he is able to offer himself as a gift, placing himself at the disposal of the community and at the service of anyone in need, his life takes on its true meaning.<sup>12</sup>

*"Mysterium fidei( The Mystery of our Faith)!"* Every time he proclaims these words after consecrating the bread and wine, the priest expresses his *ever-renewed amazement* at the extraordinary miracle worked at his hands. It is a miracle which only the eyes of faith can perceive. The natural elements do not lose their external characteristics, since the "species" remain those of bread and wine; but their "substance", through the power of Christ's word and the action of the Holy Spirit, is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. On the Altar, then, Christ crucified and risen is "truly, really and substantially" present in the fullness of his humanity and divinity. What an *eminently sacred reality!* That is why the Church treats this mystery with such great reverence, and takes such care to ensure the observance of the liturgical norms intended to safeguard the sanctity of so great a Sacrament.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most important things I have learnt in priestly life is that liturgical celebrations are to the Church and the life of a priest what a thermometer is to the human body. The degree of love, joy, zeal and dedication with which I celebrate these Sacred Mysteries always tells my priestly

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<sup>11</sup>To the gift of this singular presence, which brings him to us in his Supreme Sacrifice and makes him our bread, Jesus, in the Upper Room, associated *a specific duty of the Apostles and their Successors*. From that time on, to be an Apostle of Christ, as are the Bishops and the Priests sharing in their Mission, has involved being able to act *in Persona Christi Capitis*. This happens above all whenever the Sacrificial Meal of the Body and the Blood of the Lord is celebrated. For then the Priest as it were lends Christ his own face and voice: “Do this in memory of me” (Lk. 22:19) (Letter of Pope John Paul II to Priests on Holy Thursday, 2002, no 1).

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2003, no. 3

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2005, no. 6

degree of hotness or coldness: My Spiritual Temperature. At times, I have been at freezing points and other moments, at normal temperatures. How I ask my loving Father to give me the grace to, at least, maintain 'the spiritual room temperature' at which I normally struggle to be.

### **The Honey Moon**

Whenever I go to the "network" of my Priestly Ministry I remember the words of Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga: *Zaelus Animarum!* In spite of all the Rites we had gone through that memorable day, whenever at home someone said: "Hullo Father", meaning to call me, I always felt he was addressing some one else. But gradually people began coming for Confessions, and for Blessings! And when the Thanks-Giving Mass was celebrated, I really felt I was being confirmed as a Priest.

The real Honey Moon began with the Thanks-Giving Mass, whose preaching was done by Monsignor Charles M. Kimbowa, "my Rector". He preached on the gift of the Priesthood and the need for more vocations. I sang many parts of the Mass in Latin. I remember spending the first weeks after my Ordination in search for the sick and elderly to bring them *Holy Communion*. It is true that "some people stay longer in an hour than others can in a week" (William Dean Howells). Yes I was on fire for service! I had made private promises together with my friend Fr. Josephat Kasambula that I would always put on my Cassock whenever I went out. That I would be punctual at my Prayer Time, and that I would give every day One Hour of Eucharistic Adoration. I did it for some time in Nattyole when I was still a curate. In just one month I met Fr. Josephat in the City of Kampala and neither of us was in his Cassock! At least "the spirit was willing, though the flesh is weak" (cf. Mt.26:41).

It was all Honey Moon, with my Sunday Homilies as a Deacon, still burning with all the good Theology and Seminary Formation. One of the Dioceses I know in Italy is the Vicariate of Rome, Priests have a full-time Bishop who caters for their spiritual matters e.g. Retreats, Counseling etc. I have come to realize that we need some time of accompaniment either with a good Spiritual Director or such a person who would be there for our follow-up after Seminary Formation. We easily get frustrated when our angelic promises or desires are not seen in life. We need someone

to "confirm us" just as Peter is first called, "*Blessed are you son of Simon*" (Mt 16:17) and soon after he is rebuked "*get behind me satan!*" (Mt 16:23).

### **Friends in the Priesthood**

In my pastoral ministry God has granted me true friends in and outside Uganda. There are several precious people who have extra-supported me spiritually in these past 25 years. In Uganda there are some intercessors like Mons. Lawrence M. Jjumba, my mother and Fr. Martin Mbowa who celebrates several Masses for my intentions in the Ministry. Add to these, 'Spiritual Aunts' like Nassaka Antonia Margaret and Goreth Musiimenta as well as other pious souls who kneel steadily and steadfastly before Him for my sake.

There are many Religious Sisters worldwide who offer prayers for me. In Italy the families of Enrico Diamante, Spaziani Massimo, Rita and Mimmina her sister in Frosinone and in Copertino the family Martinna, make an extra mile in my support. The Enrico Diamante family caused the beginning of Maria Antonio Children and Women Foundation, an association which has empowered several children and women in Uganda's rural and slum areas. Further in Europe, I rely in Austria on Very Rev. Fr. Johannes Andessner of Shenkenfelden and several families there. My most supporting Parish community is St. Leopold especially, the gifted man of God very Rev. Fr. Dr. Dominic Nimmervol (Ocist), Mons. Kern Reinhold and Ms. Elizabeth L., the House Community, plus the Oblatinnes Sisters of St. Francis de Sales. In America Fr. Harry Schneider one of my best-friend Priests, mentions me during every Holy Mass (...and my friend Fr. Deogratias in Uganda, he says). Sharon Wilson from the USA, has such a critical mind that has always challenged me to be more orderly.

If I mention Priests as friends and seem to be leaving out my Ordinaries, it would be a big oversight. I owe to all of them their fatherly support throughout my Ministry.

### **The Pastoral Ministry Aftermath**

Charles Swindoll says, "*The longer I live, the more I realize the*

*impact of attitude on life. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes".* I must be proud to be a Positive Thinker. I remember in October 1999 when I came back from Rome after my Liturgy Doctoral Studies, one of my duties among others was to be the Parish Priest in a slum area in the Archdiocese of Kampala. There was no proper sanitation; the Presbytery was very small, dirty, and in a sorry state. The community itself was in chaos! Several Priests approached me to console me for having got such an appointment, despite the fact that I was a Doctor. I always responded that I was in fact the right person to be appointed there, since I had a better exposition as to what should be done.

From 1987 to 1990: I was a curate and then later the parish priest at St. Kizito Nattyole parish (Now this belongs to Kasana-Luwero Diocese). I was at the same time the Notary of the Archdiocesan Court. I enjoyed house visitations, catechetical instructions, soccer, development and the simplicity of our rural homes. I was still slender and fit. During the Pastoral House Visitations I would visit over 80 families in a day and then I would conclude with Holy Mass, with a very good meal followed by entertainments.

Nattyole has a very strong community spirit in spite of its multi cultural state. Mons. Emmanuel Kibirige (R.I.P), Fr. S. Kityo and Mons J. W. Katende prepared this Parish Community into a "teamwork spirit" for development. I loved them, they loved me. Even after my transfer from there it took me years, before I could remove Nattyole from the forefront of my preferences. I had been taken away from Nattyole, but it was very difficult to take Nattyole away from me.

From 1990 to 1993: I was appointed back to my *Alma Mater* St. Mbaaga Seminary. I continued to act as a Diocesan Notary, and at the Seminary I taught Church Music, Anthropology, Metaphysics, Theodicy, Liturgy and Catechesis. It was here that I met one of my great Priest-friends Fr. Expedit Sserunjogi. Every day has always been our first day in joy and pain, in leisure and

challenges alike. 1990 July was my first time ever to board a plane. The flight was to Frankfurt in Germany.

From 1993 to 1999: I was sent to St. Anselm in Rome to specialize in Liturgy. My Doctoral Thesis was on "***Liturgical Incarnation and Creativity***". In my last two years in Rome I also did a Diploma in Rural Sociology, specializing in the 'development of rural children and women'. This study later developed into a big Association which is now an NGO working country-wide in the names of *Maria Antonio Children and Women Foundation (MACWOF)*.

From 1999 to 2007: I Lectured in Liturgy at the Major Seminary, and I was in charge of Liturgy and the Catechetical Formation in the Archdiocese of Kampala. I was also regular Presenter on 'Radio Maria' and other mass-media, while at the same time I was working as Parish Priest at St. Balikuddembe Mengo-Kisenyi Parish.

From 2007 to 2009: I still continued to do all the above for some time while also teaching at the Philosophical College of Jinja (PCJ), a Regional Seminary for Missionaries working in Uganda. After some months, I concentrated on my new appointments as Rector of Namugongo Uganda Martyrs' Basilica and Shrine; and as promoter of the Teaching, Sanctifying and Governing Commissions in the pastoral structure of Kampala Archdiocese. It was during this time that I asked for a Sabbatical Year.

I began the Sabbatical Year in Southern Africa in Durban at Eshowe Diocese, at the invitation of the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Bishop T. X. Kumalo. During my stay there I began my 'journey of renewal' especially with the Twasana Benedictine Sisters whose Mother General, Theodora Ntuli OSB and the Chaplain, Fr. Eugen OSB introduced me into a deeper prayer life. I read several books on spirituality and one of them was by Fr. J. Nouwen entitled: "*The Sabbatical Journal*". This helped open my eyes and enabled me to use my 'sabbatical free time' to write some personal notes regarding my life's journey, which notes have eventually developed into this present book.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Faith is Networked Love**

Faith is the underlying divine network which connects our hearts and mind to the divine: the Creator. "Faith" is to acknowledge



within the heart, beyond the reach of proof. We compare our faith to the network needed for the mobile cell-phone to work. This network is invisible just as faith is; and we can only get it if there is the satellite and the phone itself switched on. Our "Divine Satellite" is God, we are the mobile phones and getting the net-work is our faith.

### **Christian faith in general**

*"He that believeth and is baptized", says Christ, "shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mk 16:16).*

And the author of the Letter to the Hebrews sums up this solemn declaration by saying: **"Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6)**. Some philosophers have explained faith as that "deep jump into the objective uncertainty".

I am gradually understanding faith as that total surrender to God, giving my 'I am' (which is a participated modality) to the purest I am: God. Faith is not faith until it is all you are holding on to.

During a retreat I conducted at Kisoga Parish in the present Lugazi Diocese, a lady gave testimony on how she had lost all her seven children to AIDS. She concluded: *"I am at peace because I know that God who created and gave them to me loves them more than I do!"*. How about that young boy on the plane who had the cabin crews ordering the passengers to tighten their belts because the plane was in danger of abrupt landing any minute? The boy was not moved at all and was not following orders. When asked why, he responded: *"I need not to, for my father is the pilot!"*

Yes, our faith, our connection to the divine network is a kind of my-father-is-the-pilot trust!

Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen (**Heb 11:1**). I hereby remember an old Italian lady whom I met near the *Piramide* in Rome. After a friendly conversation, I asked her to come and visit us in Uganda. She responded, smiling slightly: *"Father, I need not pay for going to Africa because when I come to heaven I will see all those places for free"*. It is true that *for anyone who approaches God must*

*believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Heb 11:6)*. Our simple people live and walk their faith in spite of the minimum Catechism Instruction they have had. They express their simplicity of faith in pious exercises like praying the Holy Rosary, saying often the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy, making the Way of the Cross, attending to devout Eucharistic Adoration, and other pious exercises.

As followers of Christ, we need to be connected with Him in faith: *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that He exists and that he rewards those who seek him"* (Heb. 11:6)

### **My experience of challenging faith**

The years I have been at the Shrine of the Uganda Martyrs have brought to the 'fore' for me, many cases of people who come and take the water from the Martyrs' lake, only later to come back and report that they are completely healed. I also remember at 'Holy Name Parish' in Kansas, USA, how families would come in turn for the Perpetual Adoration throughout the night while I, a Priest, would be sound asleep in bed. Faith is like electricity, you do not see it, but you can see the light coming out of it.

We can still see the living faith of our people in places of piety and pilgrimages e.g. Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje, or here in Uganda at Kabula in Masaka Diocese or at Namugongo, Uganda Martyrs' Shrine. People pray deeply in faith for the Church, for the sick, and they adore their God with real interior disposition. This is why the primary element of faith, regardless of what degree of holiness one has reached, is being connected to the divine network! Then God will fulfil his plans in and with us as we are. We have often heard people say of someone: *he/she is a person of faith!* Is this a conventional exclamation? I believe it means that *he/she is not alone in what she/he does.*

In 2005, I was invited for supper in one of the parishes in United States of America, called St. Michael parish. We chatted

freely and immensely with this family of four children, the youngest being six months old. The next day, as the husband was reversing the family pick-up car, he rode over their angel-child and, unfortunately, the innocent child died instantly. The Funeral Mass for this child was one of the most difficult Holy Masses I have ever celebrated in my life as a priest. I was surprised to see that during the Funeral Mass for that dear child, the mother of the child, supported by her husband, courageously took the First Reading, while the father of the child took the Responsorial Psalm in real faith. At the end of the Mass, these two parents read a short message for Mike, the dead child, and bid him farewell urging him to meet soon his fellow "Angels" in Heaven, together with Mother Mary Queen of the Angels. I was touched, moved and almost paralyzed in my heart!

### **Sharing our faith**

Yes, the ministry of the priest starts all and ends all with and in faith. Faith is a 'go-in-yourself-and-see-experience'. Faith is that wonderful gift, which God gives us to see what is invisible to a physical eye and to hear what is unheard for an ordinary ear. On his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Pope, when he also canonized Edith Stein, John Paul II gave us the master encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. In it, he explains that faith uplifts our wisdom and understanding to the level of recognizing God as the fullness of truth.

We are told of the story of one priest who, on a rainy day, was riding his motorcycle taking the Holy Eucharist to the sick in Southern Uganda. All of a sudden, he fell down in the mud, and as he was rising, he whispered to the Holy Eucharist (Jesus): "*Lord, I think you too have felt it.*"

The truth is that with faith we take off from the common ground. We entrust all in our life and all around us to Him who is the source of everything. We begin seeing from earth what we are to experience in eternity: *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal*

*life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him (Jn 3:36).* Faith is then that act of seeing each human being in terms of his or her ground-origin, God, and end - God. The duty of a priest then would be just tuning the people of God to their rightful "North".

It is true that the highest level of glory and call of humanity is to meet the Creator as the source of all. Then faith becomes a life we live and for which we live: *You created us for you O Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*<sup>14</sup> This is why the Psalmist sings to Him in faith: *"Glory in His Holy Name; rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord! Rely on the Mighty Lord; constantly seek his face"* (Ps 105: 3-4).

### **Faith is a light, a telescope, a microscope**

The Light of Faith illumines our ways in relationship to God. Faith is necessary for complete human living as light is for sight: *"We have the same eyes at night as during the day, but we are not able to see at night because we lack the light of the sun"*. (Joseph F. Sheen, *Lift Up Your Heart*, 153). Faith is this light, the network which enables us to see and communicate to God respectively.

Until now, I compare faith to a divine telescope or microscope. It is a 'telescope' because what seems to be far for a secular eye becomes near. It is a 'Divine Microscope' for it gives us a depth perception of truths which we already know: Marriage is no longer a temporary union between husband and wife, but a symbol of the union of Christ with His Church. Death is no longer a mere biological phenomenon but a moment to render to God an account of our stewardship. Yes, in here then our attitude in faith determines the altitude of our Christian living.

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<sup>14</sup>St. Augustine's Confessions, (Lib 1,1-2,2,5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5).

## **The network of saving faith**

Several times in the Gospels, Jesus made it for those with faith:

**Mt. 9:2:** To the Paralytic: *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Courage, children, your sins are forgiven!;* **Mt.**

**9:29:** To the blind men: *Then he touched their eyes and said, Let it be done for you according to your faith;* **Mk 10:** to the blind

Bartimaeus: *Go your way; your faith has saved you. Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.*

Our communities, the lay and the religious, let alone our fellow priests, do count much on our faith, actions, and attitude. One will easily tell whether I am still 'networking' (i.e. in connection) with the Master of the Vineyard, the source and centre of all, or not. From our simplest people in the remotest villages to those sophisticated ones, the highest institutes of ecclesiastical formation, we are all interconnected by this one and the same gift of **faith**.

Our students will eventually be the ones to tell us whether the 'Exegesis' we make in life is meant to end as 'Ex-Jesus' data; and whether Christology is to finally turn into dry 'Jesusology'. The wonder and challenge here is that faith is like a contagious disease. We shall never transmit it unless we first catch it in the first place. We have to pray for this faith constantly: "Lord, increase my faith" (**Lk. 17:5-6**).

## **Being 'connected' is not a matter of course**

Many people of God tend to take it for granted that we, the priests, are always automatically connected to 'Faith'. Perhaps this is the *main* reason why they do not pray very much for us. They naively believe that we are naturally connected directly to the Invisible. I remember during one of my trips in Italy in a train to the Basilica of my beloved one, Saint Antony of Padua. At around 4:00pm while trying to celebrate the Liturgy of Hours using my Breviary, I unfortunately fell asleep. But one old Italian Lady next to me thought I was fully deep in

"contemplation". When I woke up she started telling me how she had always admired the "holy people of God": the priests. They go into meditation even during odd hours of the day. *"Pregate sempre per noi Padre,"* she said in Italian, meaning, *"Always pray for us Father"*. This is how the simple lady expressed her faith to me, challenging me to the core!

Hundreds of thousands of people have been attracted to the Church through John Paul II: This is the Divine presence in him, resulting from his Divine connection, and his constant networking with God! When this Pope was shot at in 1981 in St. Peter's Square in Rome, he was rushed at once to Gemelli Hospital. Coming back to consciousness, the first thing he said was: *"Yes, I firmly believe, there are no accidents before God."* This is true and this is what we call Divine Providence. What God had foreseen in Eternity, we who live in time, had not yet anticipated it, but now He reveals it in time.

Divine Providence, then calls for that child-like-trust and surrender to God such that we train ourselves to accept what he had foreseen for us in Eternity and will happen in time to us who live in time. This is why, in such a connection of faith as far as prayer is concerned, the greatest and highest form is: *"Thy will be done", "Thy kingdom come"*. That is all I do ask from God, but in the end am able to say, *"I surrender to be granted anything, at the time, and in the manner that God wants"* (Mt. 6:10).

In Timothy Dolan's book (now Cardinal Dolan) we find the following:

*"A priest I had admired immediately as a boy in our parish later left priesthood. I was totally upset! He sent me a letter, which I still read on occasion. In it he said: Yes, I have lost my priestly vocation, but I must admit, I lost my faith many years ago..."*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Timothy Dolan, *Priests for the Third Millennium*, p.20.

A priest's faith will be seen! It will be seen in the pulpit, in the kind of solemnity and reverence manifested by him at Mass, and the sense of the Sacredness reflected by him at worship: our use of the Sacred language, the way we speak about the truths of our Faith, the way we conduct funeral rites, etc. I could not have imagined a priest being asked what denomination he belonged to after he has just celebrated the Liturgy. But this has happened once here in Uganda.

How many times have we asked our parishioners whether they have faith? Are we aware that their faith is a reflection of our own faith? Do we still look at the daily events of our ministry, the world, politics, creation, etc. with faith? This is the gift that keeps us all united in God.

### **Faith is A Catalyst**

Often, our instructions in the faith begin at an early age: Catechism instructions, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and so on till today. In these past years of my priestly ministry, I must confess, I have not yet grasped fully what the mystery of faith is. It is a *misteriumfascinantis* (A Fascinating Mystery). On the other hand, even if faith is a gift that is God-given, no priest or religious can give genuine reasons for not having it. Given our background in the Novitiate, in the seminaries plus our very style of life; we are meant to be people of faith. It is the divine sight and vision, which propels us through this earthly life to live it in terms of the life to come.

In my past 25 years as a priest, I have come to learn that people automatically rely on us, on our faith, on our 'assumed presence' before the Almighty on their behalf. But how can we bring their sorrows and joys, sacrifices and praise to Him whom we do not see internally? It is faith that connects us directly to the Divine Satellite! What a disappointment it would be to show them that we also are not connected! One religious puts it succinctly when he asks, "What will follow then *if the break-down itself breaks*

down?" This is why the simple consciences of our people the Faithful, who are the majority, may not understand it when they see their priest sitting with them in the assembly during the sacrifice of Holy Mass. They expect every priest during Holy Mass to always be fully vested and concelebrating as an Ordained Priest at the altar.

This looks like a childlike faith but is not childish. This sounds to be a simple faith but is not simplistic! No wonder then, for many children, the strongest man on the globe is the father and the most loving and caring person on earth is the mother at home. In one of the parishes in Europe one lady was narrating the holiness of their new parish priest: *"This is a very holy man of God, because when he exposes the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, he remains kneeling before the Lord and prays with us till the end."* One bishop said to us how, at times, it is good for a pastor to put on his clergy attire and just walk around the parish compound premises simply greetings people.

### **The Challenging Pulpit**

In preaching the word of God, I have had good homilies and poor ones too. But every time I have had the opportunity to prepare my homilies or sermons in faith; especially on my knees before the Blessed Sacrament, they were unique to me and to the assembly. I would, afterwards, get people to come to me in need of the sacrament of reconciliation and find people, who had spent over 20 years not receiving Holy Communion, coming back to the Lord. During my favorable times as I had at the parish of my first appointment, I would prepare my catechism classes well. Until today the Christians, who by then were children I instructed, do remind me of their happy memories of my moving talks. Yes, it is amazing to see that, whenever I prepared in faith, people would come to thank me and even, at times, ask for a copy of my homily.



I had a tough experience at Holy Name Parish in Kansas City. During my first Sunday homily, I was not very well prepared. At the end of the Mass, the main celebrant, together with all the Mass servers, is supposed to stand in front of the main entrance to greet the people as they go out. One lady said to me: "*Hope you will be more prepared next Sunday, Father!*" Many others did not comment, but I could see that they had not appreciated my work that day.

That very Sunday, in the after-noon, I came back into the Church and, in prayer, began preparing for next Sunday's homily. They loved it, and I was happy. I tried to keep up the standards. Normally, in Europe and Africa, people always thank us for both poor and good homilies alike, by clapping hands, and so we are not challenged enough.

One fascinating fact about our faith in preaching the Word of God is that the more you go into God's reality through meditation, the more you meet all humanity at its best. In preparing a sermon or homily, we must not so much consider whether the people we are to address are rural or urban, educated or illiterate, rich or poor. We just have to prepare to break the Good News to them as God's people; just like one would announce the death of a person. Your duty is just to announce the 'fact' in the same manner that radio announcers report that "so and so is dead". Each class of people easily finds its own way of reacting to the sad news of the deceased!

The Ministry of preaching the Word of God in faith is until today a very big challenge. I strive to live up to this challenge every day. The principle behind is: One always delivers in the Homily, less than what one prepares. The people normally understand less than what is delivered, and they usually will put still less in practice than what they have understood. Another friend of mine Fr. Eugen (OSB) once told me that always in a good Homily, "*The less the better*", and that "*less is more*"! It is very challenging for the assembly to feel that you finished some minutes before, only that you have not yet stopped. One old witty Catholic said:

"I love our young priest because when he says 'in conclusion' he concludes, but the old parish priest keeps repeating the word 'lastly' and he lasts."

Preaching is the breaking aloud of our romantic silence and presence with our God on his Word. People feel our personal amazement of the great works of God!

### **Popular missions**

"Popular Mission" Ministry<sup>16</sup> can be a very good time of Effective New Evangelization. We have witnessed the door-to-door evangelization of homes, making them aware of the on-going parish activities. Children are organized for Sports while practicing virtue and growth in faith. The youth and young adults are led into lively intensive celebrations and Mission talks. All these, especially in the line of new Evangelization, help the community increase in knowledge of the Catholic Church and faith.<sup>17</sup>

I wish here to testify that I do sincerely like and support the Catholic Popular Mission activities or Renewal Ministry. I appreciate the Word Apostolate involved, the lively worship, the powerful Catechism Instruction, their visits to the sick and others. But some members among the faithful today ask themselves whether at worship what such Missions call "**active participation**" is really not "**active entertainment**"! Things like "**exaggerated commotion**" at times do tend to over-ride the whole atmosphere of the sense of the Sacred and of interior participation, which are the real gist of the celebration. *There is music and dance for the theatre or Parish Hall, and there is Music for sacred use*".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This term is used to designate certain special exertions of the **Church's** pastoral agencies, made, for the most part, among **Catholics**, to instruct them more fully in the **truths** of their religion, to convert sinners, rouse the torpid and indifferent, and lift the good to a still higher plane of spiritual effort. See Schroeder, H.J. (1911). *Catholic Parochial Missions*. In: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 30, 2012 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10391a.htm>

<sup>17</sup> These will normally conclude with Skits, Songs or other cultural creative activities.

<sup>18</sup> (Cardinal Arinze, in: *Inside the Vatican*, Feb, 2005) see also Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instruction on Some Aspects of the Use of the Instruments of Social Communication in Promoting the Doctrine of the Faith*: Libreria Editrice Vaticana (1992; Instructions for Prayers for Healing, 2000, Art. 5 – § 1. Non-liturgical prayers for healing are distinct from liturgical celebrations, as gatherings for prayer or for reading of the word of God; these also fall under the vigilance of the local Ordinary in accordance with can. 839 § 2.

Active Participation is not so much a hearing of our selves talk to God as it is a hearing of our God talk to us. We need faith in order to understand and live this particular fact.

### **Popular piety**

As a theologian, I have at times felt uneasy with someone asking me "*Father, bless me*", and doing so five times a day. The faith of most of our people is held strong by popular piety: the scapula, medals, holy water sprinkling, the rosary, devotions, the way of the cross, the crib, the chaplet of the divine mercy etc, Parishes and communities are vibrant because of these practices. I am so devoted to the Divine Mercy, Mother Mary and St. Anthony of Padua! And I know what they mean in my life. Piety is one of the simple ways of prayer by which our people express their faith. This comportment is imbued with reverence and dignity since it allows them to penetrate invisible realities without words or explanations. These forms of piety must be valued as a natural religious expression, predisposing the people for the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries<sup>19</sup>It is a thirst for God known only to the poor and to the humble. Think of the Holy Rosary, way of the cross, the Christmas tree, holy scapula, medals, blessing of things and people, the angelus, pilgrimages etc. These exercises improve the generosity and sacrifice of the faithful to the point of heroism in testifying to the faith while displaying an acute sense of the profound attributes of God: paternity, providence, His constant and loving presence.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Confessional Box**

Yes, I still call it the Confessional Box to symbolize that "spiritual box" (conscience) of the Confessor of the Penitent.<sup>21</sup> As an African Child, I prefer to see my sins being forgiven with the imposition of hands by the Priest using both hands and with

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<sup>19</sup>Extracts from the address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Plenary Meeting of The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments(21 September 2001)no.4

<sup>20</sup> Popular Piety and the Liturgy, no. 9

<sup>21</sup> This Box binds both parties under penalty of Excommunication from the Church (CIC no. )

that special touch! This is why I do exactly this when I myself I am the Confessor.

In this celebration of the Sacrament of Penance I have found that here lies the secret of giving or sharing, especially with regard to Catechesis. Both Penitent and Confessor teach each other by the touch of their consciences, and their hearts. Here is another continuing trans-substantiation of Priesthood. "Who can forgive sins except God?" (Mk. 2:7). True, for in the Formula it is not, "God absolves you!" but, "I absolve you!" What 'a too much of Him' in me, and of me in Him!

God's trust of me to do the "Absolving", the humility and simplicity of the Penitents, the challenge of the quality of availability needed, the measure and prudence of the words of exhortation required etc ... these all leave me speechless!

We know that in this Sacrament, as in others, we Priests are called to be agents of a Grace, which comes not from us but from on High; and it works by its own inner power. In other words - and this is a great responsibility - *God counts on us*, on our availability and fidelity, in order to work his wonders in human hearts.<sup>22</sup>

### **Funeral Rites**

It is a great gift of faith to move with the Almighty in our daily surprises, favors, miracles, good health, long life, sickness, doubts, success and even death. In all my past 25 years of Priesthood, Funeral Rites have been among the most challenging celebrations. I am quickly someone who is moved by the mourners. On such occasions I easily call to mind my own dear ones who passed away, and I soon feel at one and really easily compassionate with the bereaved: "Mourn with those who mourn, says Jesus" (Rm. 12:15). I have at times tried to curb it all by thinking of my greater moments of suffering e.g. my own death. Surprisingly most people mourn for what one had to perform in life than what one was as a person! The rite of "Ashes" on Ash Wednesday brings it better to the fore: "Remember you are dust and unto dust you will return" (Gen.2:7). It is here that one discovers why we are so dear to God: our soul, created in His image and likeness. Biologically a normal adult is only 7 liters of blood, 90% water and dust!

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<sup>22</sup> Letter of Pope John Paul II to Priests on Holy Thursday, 2002, no 4.

## **Do we live what we preach?**

I am reminded of one Parish Priest who, during a Sunday Homily, preached on forgiveness and reconciliation. Soon after Mass an old lady who was a squatter on Church land and whom this very Parish Priest had warned to vacate the place, approached the preacher in the Sacristy. She pleaded for clemency just as the Sunday theme on forgiveness had rhymed. The Parish Priest responded to her, "*That was pulpit material, now here we are bringing with real-life issues!*"

One of my greatest challenges is to walk the talk of the pulpit!. Might this not be a pending case of my *Lex Orandi (The Law of Prayer)* not seen however in my *Lex Vivendi (The Law of Life)*?

If we are well prepared and immersed in the mystery of the cross, which we announce, we then *do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor 4:5)*. Living what we preach is all our life's journey.

# Chapter V

## Prayer is Love and Communion

### *Communion with God the Father*

We begin the Holy Hours Prayers in the Breviary every day, with the words: "Oh Lord open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise" (Ps.50). We lift up our hearts and soul to God, glorifying Him as our Lord and God: Abba. Prayer is the key to Heaven, but 'faith' unlocks the door. Prayer is that constant communication with God in all events of life. Faith permits me to connect to Him, who is the Divine Satellite, and prayer is the automatic dialogue between my self the child, and this Heavenly Father. Our two hands raised up to God in prayer are like the 'antenna' of the old TVs which were always used to connect to the 'sender satellite'.

We begin prayer every day with the words: "*Oh Lord, open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise.*" (**Ps 51:15**). We lift up our hearts and soul to God, glorifying Him as our God: Abba. Prayer is the key to heaven, but faith unlocks the door. Prayer is that constant communication with God in all events of life. Faith permits me to connect to Him, who is the divine satellite, and prayer is the automatic dialogue between myself the child, and this heavenly Father. Our two hands raised up to God in prayer are like the antenna of the old TVs, which were used to connect to the sender satellite.

Psalm 63 tunes us into the words: "*O God, you are my God, for you I long! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, like a land parched, lifeless, and without water, so I look to you in the Sanctuary to see your power and glory*" (**vv. 2-3**) Yes, gazing on Him is our primary responsibility but we need a desert so that He may appear to us like He did appear to Moses and Elijah. In prayer we walk our talk with Him who knows all we are and need (**Mt. 6:32**). Prayer is a repeated "*Thy (and not our) Kingdom*

come". In gazing at Him in prayer, it is more than presenting our petitions or requests, which is easily human.

### **The mistake we often make**

In many people's minds, there is no difference between prayer, request, petition and wish-list. In many local languages, it is known as 'asking' (*kusaba*) and so, when many of us decide to pray, it is to present our list of needs asking God to merely accept our wish list. But is it right to make Him a list of our needs and then come in prayer demanding that He appends His signature?

That is not what prayer should be limited to. In prayer we give God a chance to let his Kingdom grow in us so that we can see His power and glory. Prayer should be a longing of our soul; a daily admission of the *creatureness* of my life. It is even better to have a heart without words than have words without a heart.

Brother Anattoli Wasswa compares prayer to breathing. We may not eat, and yet continue living, but when we stop breathing we stop to live!

We should never feel unworthy to talk to Him about all. This is why even for a priest who has been suspended from performing all his priestly duties, the celebration of the Liturgy of Hours is not denied him. Archbishop Milingo, after his return to the Church, cried out to God after the prayer of exorcism from Pope John Paul II: "*Lord, you have fished me out of mud!*"

Wonderful! This is it with prayer: to converse with God on how things are, good or bad because He knows all about me even before I do so. Several prophets did so, and so it has always been with all the disciples of the Lord.

But how else should prayer be about?

## **Prayer is a dive into the absolute**

Kneeling before Him has always kept us in good standing. This communication helps me and not God Himself. It uplifts my finite humanity to the Infinite Presence of divine Love. Prayer as such then is the spiritual art of entering the deepest and highest centre of my life; and of humanity surrendering it to Him who owns and controls it. It is an affirmation on my part that I am the creature and He is the Creator God. It is being in God's presence with open hands and an open heart; a continuous school of life that even the Disciples of Jesus after three years say to him: "*Master, teach us to pray!*"

Every time we pray we dive into an Infinite Treasure of His being and His Love. It is as if whenever we pray we exclaim like St. Augustine: "*Late have I known you Oh Lord!*"

On this particular point, I wish to turn to something special that took place during our initiation year at Ggaba (1979-80). For us, beginners, our Morning Lauds were separate from the rest of the community. We were exclusively 'exercising' in prayer with Monsignor William Mpuuga (R.I.P). Each one of us had to write down what he had meditated upon from our special Teacher from the Lauds. And this would go on till the bell for the *Angelus* was rang, which preceded Holy Mass in the morning. But whenever one of us wrote down his meditation and in conclusion put a full stop on his last sentence, Msgr. Mpuuga would cancel that whole meditation. For him, there was no "full-stopping" when it comes to true meditation. 'We are only caught up by time' he used to emphasize. Meditation is a dive into the absolute and the infinite for which we cannot reach an end.

Another such similar story happened in the life of the late Archbishop Joseph Fulton Sheen (R.I.P) of Rochester in New York. One time he became very famous on the national television because of his spiritual talks. Then one day, one of his friends, a priest too, wrote to him a personal note, advising him to stop the TV broadcasts before he declined; so as to remain famous! The



Archbishop replied: *"I will not stop, I will not go dry, I am drinking from an endless ocean!"*

In 1997, I went on my first pilgrimage to Medjugorje. On coming back in the College in Rome, many of my friends were asking: "How is it there?" My answer always was: "It is better to go there and experience it all by yourself!" Prayer is also such a similar event: 'Infinite warmth and touch of God'. How I cherish such wonderful 'touching' personal moments of my priesthood, and how I lament at the moments when it was the opposite!

### **God answers our prayer**

All prayers are answered, if we are willing to admit that sometimes the answer may be: "No". A story goes of a 12-year-old boy who, at Christmas, kneels before the Infant Jesus in the crib and asks for 100 dollars to buy a doll of an helicopter. Two weeks after Christmas his elder sister laughs him to scorn for his Jesus who did not answer his prayers. Smilingly, the boy answers: *"He has already answered, and this time he has said, No"*.

But, often, God talks back to us or even grants our hearts desires but, oftentimes, we fail to see and just continue 'asking'. To such a heart lacking faith, God will often seem not to have answered. The infrastructure of any prayer to God is **self abandonment**: *"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done" (Mt. 6:10)*. Often, God answers our prayers in His own way and time, but we tend to keep waiting on Him in our own way and time.

The Christmas boy's story is the childlike abandonment of faith with which we ought to communicate as we pray to the Father. This was what he formed us into, to pray, *"Et divina institutione formati ...thy Kingdom come"*! Yes, the heart of prayer is the realization of God's love for me and my response in total surrender to his love. This demands faith; the involvement of one's whole being. It is the ultimate act of man.

How about the seeming delay to answer on the part of God? Yes, but in faith there is no delay if He is to answer in His own time and ways. Secondly, at times He does it so that our communion with Him may grow; so that instead of concentrating on what we are saying to Him we may concentrate on gazing at Him (*Lift up your heart, 2Cor 12:9,10*). Thirdly, prayer is not so much a search as it is a waiting. Waiting places the emphasis on the other person who is coming. I can only wait for this person. To wait is to express my powerlessness, my insufficiency and be present only in waiting. As a matter of fact the basic value of prayer is more than what we intend. Prayer then is a shaping of our selfishness and egoism to let God shine in us with his love. This is why "love is prayed faith!" I remember this failed me throughout my Seminary prayer to God whenever I had to kneel begging Him to make me His own priest: "*Lord I ask that you will make me a priest*" (i.e. not according to thy will).

### **People Count on Us!**

There is a story of a dying father of the family who called his children to his bedside. One of them was a priest. The agonizing father said:

*John you are an attorney. I want you immediately to review my will to make sure everything is up-to-date and in order. Michael, you are an accountant, so go over the books and assure me that there are no gaps or danger signals. Larry, as my inventor, review the portfolio and determine that everything is stable and in order. Joseph, you take care of your mum and sisters. They will be very upset and you are closest to them. Tony my insurance expert, see that I am fully covered during recuperation and take care of all the expenses". They were all breathless and taking notes, and his son the priest was the only one remaining. He then said*

*what am I to do father? "Of course: nothing else but pray for me!"<sup>23</sup>*

Lord, thank you for the many souls that have trusted in our communion with you in prayer. The hundreds of thousands of Mass intentions left behind for us to pray for the deceased. Requests hidden from medical doctors, lawyers, friends and relatives, but are only revealed to me a priest in the highest confidentiality. Yes, also at this point, I can call myself an *alter Christus*.

Might it be true, as I seem to observe, that the tone of prayer of the parish normally runs after that of their parish pastor or pastors? I have lived vibrant moments of prayer in my life as a priest. I remember in one of the parishes how people were flowing in from near and far for the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy, the devotion to St. Anthony, feasts of Mother Mary, let alone the devotion to the Uganda Martyrs. I must mention here that my devotions to the chaplet of the Divine Mercy, Mother Mary and the Holy Rosary and St. Anthony of Padua have yielded an abundant richness of material and spirituality in my life, in our family and in the people with whom I have shared the same love of these devotions.

Prayer is the surest way for both sinners and good people (**Mk 5:45**). The network is not for good actions or good people only; even bad people use it. Therefore, in whatever circumstances of life we may be in, we should pray for our selves, too. Archbishop Joseph Fulton Sheen says that he did so on every Saturday. I can imagine that one of the greatest pains for the souls in hell is the regret not to have asked God for true contrition and God still asks them why they did not ask Him. How many innocent souls have I assisted at their hour of death trusting in my prayers to intercede for them before the throne of mercy? What an infinite debt and challenge that even now clearly shows before my mind and heart?

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<sup>23</sup> Timothy Dolan, 255.

## **Prayer is a spiritual chain**

Prayer is that intrinsic communication with the ground of my existence and thus the existence of all creation. In communicating with God, I meet all the other creation. If I can take the example of celebrating the Liturgy of Hours; we join our Lord Jesus to stand before the Father on behalf of the whole world. Then we are in communion with Mother church, and all who perform this office are not only fulfilling a duty of the Church, but also are sharing in the greatest honour accorded to Christ's Spouse. They are standing before God's throne in the name of the Church, their Mother (SC 85).

In prayer, official or casual, we join the eternal chain of the power of our priesthood, thus supporting each other worldwide. At ordination, we welcome our brother priests ordained to the *communio presbyterorum* by our imposition of hands, after the ordaining bishop has finished. Those we embrace at arrival should always be remembered, even when it means being stopped from their priestly duties for one reason or another. Once, when still a seminarian, I met a priest who had been suspended. Good enough, I was the first to see him. I run away at once. I hope he did not see me. Poor Seminarian then! But not running away is not enough. We must especially pray for such priests, and spend less time evaluating the decisions of the Diocesan Bishop or Curia. Finding out the reasons for which our brother priest was punished may not help much either. One of the very simple and practical ways regarding praying for others is that when someone is in need of prayers, do not just promise to pray for her or him; pray for that person there and then.

## **The Prayer obligation**

In life, challenges are always there to strengthen our convictions. In the sanctifying ministry, the Liturgy of Hours has been one of my out-standing challenges as a Diocesan Priest, where community prayer is not commonly the norm of the day.

Whenever I have had a community to pray with, I have found it easier and even would find prayer more appealing. This is why in my life I still uphold the desire to join Monastic Life, so that I can dedicate the last part of my life in prayer communion with God. To this I would add the interior disposition at all celebrations as it is required by Mother Church: "*That their words (Priests) match their thoughts*" (SC.14).

I must accept that I have read much about prayer because I have always found it challenging. But up to now I am still nothing more, nothing less than a simple learner. Perhaps I should continue to learn from the 'power of **now**'. Often-times we may spend much time preparing ourselves to pray and yet spend very little in prayer itself. How I wish I always brushed off this procrastination and I prayed in the now, referred to in Latin as the *hic et nunc*!

I have struggled making time tables so as to fulfil this obligation but this has not made it any easier. I have often postponed or found myself substituting prayer for some other seemingly important activity. I remember one instance in my first parish of appointment (1987-90) when, one evening, I was coming back home from "Pastoral Visitation". I met a Moslem friend. We started a warm conversation but at one point he instantly said to me: "*Father, I am sorry I must leave and go because it is time for prayer!*" I had spent a week without touching my priestly book of prayer, the Breviary! I was shocked and challenged and so I drove home immediately to the parish and made a bee line to my Evening Prayers. This is how it is at times!

Prayer has always uplifted me and now I am fighting to see that I master that art of meditation by "still presence," through *mantras*. Whenever I make my morning or evening "mantra meditation", I feel myself transcending the common-round of things and I feel free inside myself. I like praying, but I still find myself failing to pray; to pray successfully. I am still being challenged by people who say to me: "*Father, since you are a spiritual man; Father Deogratias, They told me you are the only*

one who will pray for me for a change in my life! Father, we like your meditated Homilies very much, etc. etc. This keeps me on my toes and reminds me of who I am supposed to be, if I am to connect and communicate to the Divine Presence all through.

In my Governing Ministry, regarding "power", "authority" and "access to temporal goods", my prayer has always been one; that God gives me what I need for the ministry and grants me excellent spiritual and bodily life. I have accomplished several development projects for the people, both in and outside my diocese of incardination. I have prayed often for the poor, the needy and those suffering; and as indicated earlier, eventually I have established a foundation for helping the rural children and women for their empowerment. It is called Maria Antonio Children and Women Foundation. I have never pretended before God in prayer i.e. telling Him that I prefer poverty to richness, no. I have always moved with Him in that openness of heart with which I talk with my mother at home or other close friends.

As I have explained above, transfers from one parish to another have always been a serious challenge in my life: to leave behind the people I had been used to and had been working with.

Regarding my superiors, I have so far had three of them: Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga, Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala and the present one His Grace Archbishop Dr. Cyprian Kizito Lwanga. I have always loved my Bishops and we agreed together with my young brother who comes after me, Emmanuel Kiganda, who is also a priest, that our scale of values with regard to authority should be: God, my Bishop and then others. And so far, so good! I have always prayed for them, not only during Holy Mass, but I have also asked many trusted friends whom I have often given Mass Intentions to seriously pray for them.

At the celebration of my Silver Jubilee, I still ask of the Lord Jesus to teach me how to pray like the disciples asked Him to. All the prayer skills I am exercising like the "Mantras Way" cannot bear fruit if He does not "teach me how pray!" A rightful

record of my prayer-tone shows me how the first part of my conscious prayer life-span has been more on 'petitions'. Thanks be to God that I am now gradually beginning to switch over to a spirit of 'gratitude' and 'praise'. How I desire that I do not only thank Him by word but also by my very life!

The Holy Eucharist has a primary place here to keep me in this spirit and in the grace of thanksgiving: The greatest act of thanksgiving between heaven and earth. St. Jean Marie Vianney, the Cure of Ars says that the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanks even greater than martyrdom. In martyrdom humanity offers human sacrifice to God for humanity. In the Eucharistic Celebration God is offered to God for humanity!

The best and most practical solution to the above mentioned challenges is daily abandonment of the Will of God and self acceptance. This, however is a whole life's journey of growth as one would find in the life of Mother Mary and John Paul II.

### **The Woman of Perfect Communion**

"Behind every great man, there is a surprising woman." As far as my Priestly Ministry is concerned, this woman is none other than Mother Mary. Before God, things are as they really are, and as they ought to be. According to the Divine Master-plan of creation, all things were as they are supposed to be: "God saw how good it was" (Gen 1:10). But the sin of Adam ruptured this plan and we are all born in "If three". We are since then, the "If-Adam-and-Eve-had-not-sinned" people of God. In his infinite mercy, as He prepared a Savior for us, God first presented Mother Mary as the only one who was born according to the first and original Master-plan. So, Mother Mary through her obedience became the most perfect creature. Because of the Savior she would agree to give birth to, she is praised for remaining as she ought to have been by and before God.

Mary the purest of creatures providentially, became the Mother of the One through whom she was created. She is the only mother both in Heaven and on earth whose child is also her Creator (Jn. 1:3). But she too is great because on her part she did surrender to the "I am - God," when she positively responded to the message of the

Angel: "Let it be done unto me according to thy word". This *Fiat* is her basic identity and activity. She was perfectly devoted to what was granted her by Divine Providence. What was hers in Eternity in God's plan, was effected at her Immaculate Conception, and was fulfilled with her personal will at the Annunciation and Birth of the Savior. She continued in living the same spirit till the end of her lifetime here on earth, and also in the here-after - Her Assumption into Heaven.

In the Music Language we would say that with Mary and in Mary, on the Piano Octave of the history of our salvation, all Music had been written in the Open Key of the White Notes (C).

Adam and Eve played one of the Black Notes on the Piano in their unfortunate disobedience to God. Then the infinite mercy of God turned this very Key into the very First Note, and thus building another new Spiritual Octave of infinite grace in the key of G. "Oh *Felix Culpa!*" (= Oh Happy Fault). No wonder then that many call her "Co-Redemptrix". From this 'divine exception', as Mother of the Savior, derive all the other Marian Dogmas: The *Immaculate Conception and the Assumption into Heaven*. Sin became a "happy fault" (*Felix culpa* in Latin); for a new and optimum Octave was constructed right out of Adam and Eve's error.

### **John Paul II A True Marian**

The first group of 'Marians' I met was a small local community then suspected by the local Church to be fanatics. Pope John Paul II is a true Marian at that! He is one of the greatest Popes of the Church whom I have personally known: He is John Paul II. I am proud to have been the Secretary of the Music Committee that sang during the Mass led by this Holy Father at Namugongo Uganda Martyrs' Shrine in 1993, during his pastoral visit to Uganda.

Further still, after Pope John Paul II's visit to Uganda in February that year, I was privileged in the July of the same year to be sent to Rome to study Liturgy at St. Anselm and so to come still nearer to this same holy man. The love of this Pope for Mother Mary was unique. I have tried to follow him through and through, even long before I became a Priest. I did read whatever came my way from or about him. This is why here I take a moment of reflection about his witness in prayer, especially with regard to Mother Mary.



On 18<sup>th</sup> May 1920 John Paul II was born of Carol Woytyla and Emil Woytyla. On 20<sup>th</sup> of the same month he was baptized. On 13<sup>th</sup> April 1929 his mother died of kidney problems and heart failure. He stayed with his father, a military man, who earned very little. Carol continued into adulthood remembering his father's love for him and his father's devotion to the Holy Rosary. Shortly after the death of his mother, Carol's father took him before a certain image of Mather Mary at a prominent Franciscan Monastery and intimated to him that this was his "new mother". This, plus the sincere prayer-life of his father, did influence Carol to enter the Seminary later.

In February 1940, Carol Woytyla Junior met some Carmelite mystics who introduced him to the Living Rosary Youth Groups, of which he himself founded 15 other such groups later in his life. In 1941 on February 18<sup>th</sup>, his beloved father also died. Later in adulthood he sadly reflected on the event and wrote, "*I have never felt so lonely in my life, in spite of all the friends with me at the wake!*"

In 1942 young Carol entered the Seminary at Krakow, which by then was a clandestine Institution, for the Nazi-Germans were in control of Poland. During his formation, classmates tell how on every page of his Notes or Exams, he always wrote: "*To Jesus through Mary*" or "*Jesus Mary and Joseph!*" (George Weigel, *A Biography of John Paul II: Witness to Hope*, p.78).

On 13<sup>th</sup> October 1946 Carol Woytyla was Ordained a Priest, and soon after his Ordination, Cardinal Sapiyeha said to him: "*Having ordained you a Priest, you shall say, after your Thanksgiving Mass, three other Masses: To the Holy Spirit, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and a third for The Souls in Purgatory*" (George Weigel, *op.cit.* p.81).

On his hand-written Ordination-Invitation-Cards, Carol wrote simply, "*Fecit mihi magna*", in Latin, meaning, "He did great things for me" (Lk.1:46-55). On 15<sup>th</sup> November 1946 he was sent to Rome for Further Studies at the Angelicum Pontifical University. From there, he immediately went to meet Padre Pio at a place called Giovanni Rotondo in Southern Italy: for Confession! In

1948 he became a Country Curate of the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady. At the same time he was also the Chaplain at the Jagelonian University, where he created many Living Rosary groups.

In 1958 Fr. Woytyla was elected Auxiliary Bishop by Pope Pius XII. On his Coat of Arms he wrote simply, "*Totus tuus*", an adaptation of St. Louis de Montfort's prayer of dedication to the Blessed Virgin Mary, meaning "I am all yours" (George Weigel, op.cit.p.150).

In 1962 one of Woytyla's friends, Dr. Wanda Poltawska, was stricken by terminal cancer. Bishop Carol wrote to Padre Pio asking him to pray for this man for a cure. The cancer it is said disappeared miraculously. In 1965 Woytyla the Auxiliary Bishop became the Ordinary of the Diocese of Warsaw. In 1968 he was made Cardinal and ten years later on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1978 he was elected Pope to succeed Pope John Paul I. An old lady in Poland spontaneously exclaimed, "*How will he accomplish such a big task ahead of him. May be he will repeat his usual words: Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and then create his usual Rosary Groups*" (George Weigel, op.cit. p.257).

John Paul II's first Papal speech with Cardinals included among other things the following: "*Everything I will say is less than what my heart feels. Let us live only the prayer of silence. I ask you: be with me at **JASNA GORA** and everywhere. Do not cease to be with the Pope who says: Mother of God, defend us and always shine before us*" (George Weigel, op.cit. p.267).

At 13:13 Hours, on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1981 Ali Agca attempted to kill Pope John Paul II in St. Peters' Square. Later, Agca is said to have loudly wondered how this man did not die: "Given his experience (Agca), the technological superiority of the type of gun he used, the number of shots fired, and the millimeter distance he had".

When the Pope was shot at and fell in his Papal-mobile, with-in a split second the whole multitude of pilgrims in St. Peters Square found themselves singing, "*Salve Regina, Mater Misericordiae ...*" Here was a miraculous event manifesting itself in the several bullets: "One missed the spinal-cord, the other missed the main

artery, another broke his finger and fell in the Papal-mobile, while still another one wounded some two American pilgrims".

On 17<sup>th</sup> May 1981, just four days after the above incident, Pope John Paul II sent a tape-recorded message to those gathered in St. Peter's Square: *"I am particularly close to the two people wounded with me. I pray for that brother of ours who shot at me, whom I have sincerely pardoned, united with Christ the Victim, I offer my sufferings to the Church and to the world: To you Mother Mary, I repeat: Totus tuus ego sum"* (George Weigel, op.cit. p.414).

On 13<sup>th</sup> May 1982, the first anniversary of the above attempt, John Paul II visited Our Lady's Shrine of Fatima for gratitude and dedication of the whole world especially Russia to Mother Mary.

In March, on 27<sup>th</sup> 1987 John Paul II gave us the Encyclical *"Redemptoris Mater"* and on 7<sup>th</sup> June of the same year he declared a special Marian Year. During the Jubilee Year 2000, the Pope invited all bishops from all over the world to join him in dedicating the whole world to Mother Mary in Rome, before the Holy image of Mother Mary of Fatima. He soon added the Mysteries of Light to the traditional three Mysteries of the Holy Rosary. For him *"the Rosary of the Virgin Mary is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness... Through the Rosary, the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer!"*(*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, no.1). In this above quoted Pastoral Letter the Holy Father explained that in praying the Rosary we contemplate the face of Jesus together with Mary, and we pray for peace in the family.

### **The Standing Task to Pray**

My Sanctifying Ministry experience might be that of any other ordinary Diocesan Priest, Religious, or any Lay person. Brother Anattoli Wasswa compares prayer to breathing. We may not eat, and yet continue living, but when we stop breathing we stop to live!

I have many lived great moments of prayer and 'constant communion'. This was especially during my first years in the Priesthood, which were my "honey moon" days. I was always uplifted, joyful, and less worried. I had a clear vision of what I was doing and people challenged me whenever they showed their trust in my readiness and capacity to pray for them. I also remember vividly my dark nights of communion with God when prayer would become a real burden. Worse does it seem to become, that the more I approach and go past the 25 years of my Priesthood, the less I tend to enjoy prayer!

Whenever prayer diminishes I am most likely to under-go the same journey of Peter's denials. First, Jesus says, "*All of you will have your faith shaken*", (Mk. 14:27). "Losing faith" means not connecting oneself to the "divine network," and thus not communicating with God: NOT PRAYING. Then Jesus asks 'them' to pray: "*Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go to pray'*" (Mk. 14:32). At the real crux of it all, when the Master was in deep prayer to the point of sweating blood, the 'disciples' were sleeping: "*When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test...'*" (Mk.14:37-38f; Lk.22:44-46; Jn.18:18).

The two commonest weaknesses we find here are: Too much love for comfort, and the belief in the use of force as a remedy for all problems.

### **The Love of Comfort**

Because, three times, instead of kneeling to pray as they were being requested by the Master, they are enjoying sleep. Before this they had enjoyed too much of the 'food and drink' at the Last Supper. This lead them into some sort of 'irresistible' desire to sleep. It is said that scientifically there is some intimate connection between too much eating and too much sleeping.

Yes, exaggerated devotion to the morning pillow, while the Master is suffering, is one of the signs of the eventual decadency in our *Sequella Christi* (=the *Following of Christ*) - of communicating

with the Master. While the Master was being slapped and tortured at the Pillar, Peter was comfortably enjoying the fire-warmth.

Also for us, habitual negation of our Master in our Priestly duties eventually leads us to escaping from Jesus and from the community in which we are planted; just as in the case which we read about of the young man who many Commentaries identify with St. Mark the Evangelist himself: *"Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked"* (Mk. 14: 51). I have known of some good fellow Priests who have literary disappeared like this in a simple but serious way like the 'running away' of young Mark above. I too personally remember times when I almost experienced the same thing exactly and I must confess, I would rarely be found by my community members, my Parishioners or others who had genuine needs to present to me.

The above was my "dark night of the soul". I would feel no taste for the Ministry, I would perpetually be tired through and through, I would feel lonely, the Parish duties became a huge burden, and at times I exaggerated rewarding myself with beers and comfort. I would make unnecessary phone-calls and useless-outings. I would be very demanding on my subordinates and co-workers etc. This can and perhaps has happened many times to any one of us; this is still part of the journey of communication with God: it is prayer life at its worst! It is said that the only terrible mistake we often make is one of not learning from our mistakes. I have really learnt a lot from many of my errors.

### **Belief in the Use of Force**

To defend his Master, Peter used the sword he had carefully made sure he kept with him for the purpose, and cut off the ear of one of the attackers of Jesus. But Jesus restored that man's ear to health and urged Peter to return the sword to its hiding place. Too much love for comfort as shown above and too much faith in the use of force always leads to the denial of Jesus our Master and Lord. Hence the consequential denial of his Master three times: *"I do not know him"* (Lk. 22:57,58,60).

Often-times we resort to power or authority and forcefully demand

for obedience from our subjects when the 'wisdom of prayer' fails. This force without prayer shows itself in many different ways in our Ministry: *"Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear"* (Jn. 18:10). The most admirable thing is that all such "stamina" can, with faith, be turned into prayer: a childlike communication with the Lord for a strong turning point in our Ministry.

It is only the dead fish that swims with the current. Powerful people do go habitually against the current, just as also the aero-plane takes off against the wind. This book is part of that flight against all such wind. Thank you Lord that I can now look back and write about this as testimony and objective evaluation for myself and also as a help for my fellow Priests, Religious men and women as well as devoted Lay People alike.

In the Teaching Ministry I have at times relied on mere skill. But how much have I been touched by the Reflections, Sermons and Homilies of some simple Priest-friends whom I know do pray! One of my adopting "Spiritual Aunts", a Mukiga Lady called Maria Goreth Musiimenta challenged me one time when I said to her that she had just missed a very moving homily by one visiting Priest. The people had clapped for him for several minutes. To this Goreth replied: *"Then that was a mere good talk and not a prayed-reflection. Had it been a moving Homily he would have left the people high up in contemplation, ecstasy and silence!"*

In life, challenges are always there to strengthen our convictions. In the Sanctifying Ministry, the Liturgy of Hours has been one of my out-standing challenges as a Diocesan Priest, where Community Prayer is not commonly the norm of the day. Whenever I have had a community to pray with, I have found it easier and even would find prayer more appealing (SC 22). This is why in my life I still uphold the desire to join Monastic Life, so that I can dedicate the last part of my life in prayer communion with God. To this I would add the interior disposition at all celebrations as it is required by Mother Church: *"That their words (Priests) match their thoughts"* (SC.14).

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more, nothing less than a simple learner. Perhaps I should continue to learn from the "power of **now**". Often-times we may spend much time preparing ourselves to pray and yet spend very little in prayer itself. How I wish I always brushed off this procrastination and I prayed in the now, the *hic et nunc*!

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### **Prayer Uplifts**

Prayer has always uplifted me and now I am fighting to see that I master that art of meditation by "still presence," through *mantras*. Whenever I make my Morning or Evening "mantra meditation" I feel myself transcending the common-round of things and I feel free inside myself. I like praying, but I still find myself failing to pray; to pray successfully. I am still being challenged by people who say to me: "*Father, since you are a spiritual man; Father Deogratias! They told me you are the only one who will pray for me for a change in my life. Father, we like your meditated Homilies very much, etc.etc.*" This keeps me on my toes and reminds me of who I am supposed to be, if I am to connect and communicate to the Divine Presence all through.

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At the celebration of my Silver Jubilee, I still ask of the Lord Jesus to teach me how to pray like the disciples asked Him to. All the prayer skills I am exercising like the "Mantras Way" cannot bear fruit if He does not "teach me how pray!" It is prayer that charges me into love and joy; essential tools of my Priestly Ministry.

A rightful record of my prayer-tone shows me how the first part of my conscious prayer life-span has been more on 'petitions'. Thanks be to God that I am now gradually beginning to switch over to a spirit of 'gratitude' and 'praise'. How I desire that I do not only thank Him by word but also by my very life!!!

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is a Sacrifice of Thanks even greater than martyrdom. In martyrdom humanity offers human sacrifice to God for humanity. In the Eucharistic Celebration God is offered to God for humanity!

# **PART THREE:**

## **The Stewardship) Ministry**

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### **Chapter VI**

#### **Deacons of Joyful Faith, Hope and Love**

##### **Divine Providence**

Providence is God's loving-care for us and the need for confidence in Him. *Providence* suggests two things. That God sees "for" me and that He sees "before" me. Both are intrinsically true. God sees "for me," in that He always gives me from what was in Him in Eternity; and He reveals it to me in time in the best way and at the best time. This means that living this life on earth, to accept and try to understand what He has prepared for me, is to score an excelling mark in life. The other point is that "He sees before" me. The plans of God are immanent and eternal in Him but because we live in time which is definite and thus limited, we cannot know them before He reveals them in time. This is why *Providence* suggests that, "He sees them before I myself see them" because they are in Him in Eternity.

This Divine Creator is the source of my life, and when His Presence is expressed as all-embracing, it is meant to be a source of joy. I am secure because no matter what happens, the hand of God always has hold of me. This intrinsic presence clears all worries in my life; giving me peace. Every act of creation and birth is strikingly Providential. Each newborn infant

demonstrates the tremendous care and attention which God has for each one of us. This is why every time we turn to Him, the best communication should express that root of our nothingness before Him; surrender: "Thy will be done, thy Kingdom come". He is the only one who has been, is, and will ever be (cfr. Heb 13:8).

Amazingly, in God even right now we find the strongest impact of the power of **NOW**. He is the deepest ground of my being, dynamic, and ever life-giving. Even in knowing me, God knows me personally, calls me by name, loves me not as one of those He created, but as that part of His own image in an individuated identity of my being. God *knows* me, and He still wants to pursue a personal relationship with me. That is truly amazing! He *knows* everything about me, and still wants to enjoy my fellowship with Him. This is the Mystery of the Divine Love I carry in me, the same one that you the reader carry in yourself. How we ought to sing with Mary: "*The Almighty has done great things for me*" (Lk.1:49)!!!

#### **A Small Boy in Some "Caritas Mission" of Sorts**

God must have loved me! I still remember most of the details of the first part of my infancy before joining Bukalasa Seminary. Teddy Nalukwago (R.I.P), one of my maternal Aunts, had twins, yet she wanted to go and work in Kakuuto town. Since the three sisters loved and trusted each other so much, my mother decided to send me to help out - My First Caritas Mission of sorts - as a baby sitter to the twins. One of them is Nalongo Nakato. She has also been blessed twice with twins and is married at Ssegguku on Entebbe Road in Kampala. I had a wonderful time here in Kakuuto with my maternal Aunt Teddy Nalukwago who was married to Mr. Bwagu. Here I was also exposed to several interesting items.

In addition to the baby-sitting mentioned above, I used to cultivate big gardens of sorghum, and I remember the first pair of shoes in my life was from such a garden. On the memorable day, we went with my Aunt Teddy to the Open Market locally called *Akatale k'Omubuulo*, on the first Saturday of the month, and I chose the pair of shoes I wanted. They were "pointed" at the end, and that was the fashion of the time. As for the rest of the money, I used it to buy pan-cakes. I also paid for three songs to a Radio-Gramophone-man, who played them for me. One of the songs

was: *"Teddy the fat one you are better than all the others"*. It was in the local language Luganda: *"Tereza ow'ebbina eddene gw'obakira"*. This song touched both of us hugely, for on the part of my Aunt, her first name was Teddy; and she was not small in size!

### **An Actively Surprising Boy in Kooki**

The second part of my **Caritas Mission** was in Kooki with my paternal Aunt Merciane at Kassabukengere, who was married to a 'bird clan' man called Medard Zziwa. Both loved me and taught me the habit of early rising to work, while I was studying at the area's Protestant Primary School. We used to sing cultural songs and both my-self and my paternal Uncle Medard would occasionally dance for my Aunt. I would go over the mountains of Kateerero to visit my other relatives like Aunt Nakirijja in Kibaale. I remember at times together with my relatives waking up after Mid-night to go out and catch white-ants, with burning flames of fire at the ant-hills up the mountains. During the grass-hoper-season we would go for the catch, over the mountains, spending there almost the whole day. We would come back in the evening to fry them and I would share them just with my paternal Uncle Merdad Zziwa; since in Buganda by then it was forbidden for women to eat grass-hoppers.

### **Faith and the Stewardship Ministry**

There is nothing that wastes the body like worry, and "anyone who has any faith in God should be ashamed of worrying about anything whatsoever" (Mahatma Gandhi). In faith as a Priest I have tried to handle temporal goods with a spirit of trust in Divine Providence. If there is an aspect of my Priestly Ministry for which I have worked steadily without any pause, it is this one. I come from a very simple poor family but this spirit was inspired into me by the words of Jesus: *"Seek first the Kingdom of heaven and the rest will be given to you"* (Mt.6:33).

Thank God, I have never worried over what to have, where, from whom, and how; and I must confirm I have always had what I needed for the Priestly Ministry.

One challenging aspect on the use of property is the issue 'community property'. It is certainly difficult to maintain for

long something declared "a community affair," especially if the members are many. Here we shall have to cultivate more and more the spirit of living for the Common Good.

The Church-Practice of frequently Transferring Priests from place to place, have been a very big challenge to me because of the affection I will have always developed with the community where I have been posted. My first Transfer was from St. Kizito Nattyole parish to St. Mbaaga Seminary Ggaba. I had just bought a new Honda Motor-cycle (250c.c.) and I had acquired some property there. I left 'everything' and donated it all to the Parish, including the Motor-cycle; so that my fellow priests who had succeeded me could use it.

When I arrived at St. Mbaaga Seminary my fellow Priests were enthusiastically asking me, "Where is your property?" I said, "This is all I have!" It was 'all' in one small suite-case! This was a very big surprise to them, given all the Development Programs they knew that I had realized in Nattyole. I remember Bishop Joseph Mukwaya (R.I.P) writing to me a personal letter of gratitude, specifically mentioning the "many developments" I had accomplished there at Nattyole and the spirit of self-abnegation I had displayed in donating all my property to the Parish, including my first new motorcycle.

My second Transfer was from Ggaba to Rome for Studies. I had never thought I would be sent any-where for Further Studies. I remember that one year before I was chosen for Rome Studies, I had approached one of my close friends, now a Bishop, and consulted him about my decision to ask for a Transfer away from the Seminary so that I could go for another 'rural pastoral' Ministry. He in response answered: "*Never ask for an Appointment or a Transfer. Stay and do what you can before God, and do always what is in the dictates of your conscience*".

On leaving the Seminary for Rome I gave all my books to the Seminary, and they were my 'most precious possessions' I had, because I like reading and studying very much. Secondly, I had just returned from Germany and some friends there had just bought for me a New Carina Sports car. Fr. J.C. Maviiri came to pay me US\$ 7000.00 for it; and I told him that I had already given it to the Archbishop of Kampala so that he could allocate it where he felt there was need.

Here was I giving my car to the Church, but I had no air-ticket to Rome! So I went to Fr. Louis Kibanyi (R.I.P) then at Katikamu Parish who then lent me the money for the air-ticket.

My Third Transfer was from St. Balikuddembe Mengo-Kisenyi Parish to the Uganda Martyrs' Parish Namugongo. I gave most of my books again to the Seminary of St. Mbaaga and I left all my property at the Parish. Surprisingly, when the Parishioners of my new Parish learnt of this, they gave me more than I had left behind. This has been my 'Priestly story' till today, and I have never doubted for a second in Divine Providence. This is why my last Will states: "**All I have belongs to the Church and during my Funeral Mass I ask that the Alleluia Chorus from Handel be sung or played prominently.**" This is meant to help me embrace soon the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, "Who emptied Himself of everything, not only of what he had, but also of what He was" (Eph 2:10-16). The apostle James says: "Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let your perseverance be perfect so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jam. 1: 2-4).

### ***The Divine Chain of Love***

Duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do them beautifully. Those who love deeply never grow old; they may die of old age, but they die young in spirit. It is true that Love begins in a moment, grows over time, and lasts for Eternity. God who is Love must have loved me for having allowed me to experience such love that I have so far received, given the fact that I have myself given back so little. In the past 25 years of my Priestly Ministry, I have come to realize that love means committing oneself without guarantee, giving oneself completely in the hope that our love will produce love in the loved person. This is why love in the end is an act of faith, and whoever is of little faith is also of little love.

Our joyful love as Christians is sacrificial, springing from the Holy Cross (2Tim. 4:20, Ac. 18:2, 3, Ac. 19:22, Ac. 20: 4, 21-29). There is a Divine chain in this Christian truth. God loved us to the point of giving us his only Son to die for our salvation (1Jn. 4: 9-10). We too must love up to that point: "*There is no greater love than one giving up one's life for the*

*other."* This is why Saint Paul prays: *"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3:18:19).

Love is not written on paper, for ink can be erased. Nor is it etched on stone, for the stone can be broken. But it is inscribed on a BIG HEART and there it shall remain for ever. This is why Jesus Christ on the Cross gives us all from his Heart, a tip of what he had commanded on Holy Thursday, leaving us a live memorial of his Body and Blood. Chiara Lubich the Founder of the Focolare Movement says: *"On the Cross Jesus gives us everything: forgiveness to sinners, Heaven to the Good Thief, he gave away his mother, he gave his own body and blood, and his very life to the point of crying: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me' (Mt. 27:46)"*. Now Jesus has entrusted us with His Ministry from the Father so that we too may love as He and the Father love in sacrifice.

It is said that to those who would attend the Catechism Instructions of St. John Mary Vianney the Cure of Ars, two things were equally remarkable: *"What he said was always more than words; it was a soul, a holy soul, filled with faith and love that poured itself out before you. You would then feel in your own soul the immediate contact and warmth of God. As for the listener, one would no longer be on earth, but into those purer regions, from which mysteries descend"* (Fr. Michael M., *Prayer*, p.69). For St. Vianney: *"No eloquence had ever before drawn forth more souls, and penetrated deeper into the hearts of men. His words opened a way before them like flames and the most hardened heart came back to God, not by way of long arguments but by the paths of love for them"* (Fr. Michael., *Prayer*, p.70).

Love emits waves of love just as hate and anger do the opposite. St. Thomas of Villanova says: *"Experience shows us every day that a Priest of moderate learning, but full of love of Jesus Christ, converts more souls than many learned priests without love"* (Fr. Micheal, p.71, see also: Timoth Dollan, *Priests for the Third Millenium*, p.307 and pp.273ff). We are challenged with daily demand and expectations... daily prayer, study, preparation for Liturgy, endless Meetings, and Ministry...etc. Experience shows and gives direction. All gifts without love are nothing (cf. Cor.12:31).

In the natural order, life depends on sacrifices. Minerals must be sacrificed in order for plants to live, and plants must be consumed for animals to live, and human beings depend on animal sacrifices for their living - the food chain. In the spiritual order also, life depends on sacrifices: The Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross being the climax of all sacrifices (Heb. 10); and then, the sacrificial love of a Priest or Religious, emanating from that of Christ (Phil. 2: 6-11). We love freely, free from all and free for all. St. Ignatius of Loyola, thus in his song "*Suscipe Domine,*" acclaims of this love: *Amorem tui solum, cum gratia tua, mihi dones, mihi dones et dives sum satis...!*

St. Augustine compares the Apostles Peter and John, wondering who of the two shared Jesus Love most. According to him, Peter is more for Jesus because Jesus loved him much, but John is much joyful because he loved Jesus much more. When Jesus asks Peter: "*Simon, son of John, do you love me (agapas me) more than these do? (Jn. 21:15),* Peter replied, "*Yes Lord, you know I love you (filo se)" (Jn. 21: 15).* Jesus uses the verb *agapeo* in Greek, which refers to an 'all-in-all-love'. Peter instead uses the verb *files*, which expresses 'poor human love'. It is at the third time that Jesus adjusts himself to the poor human love of Peter and simply asks him if he loves him as a poor man can love (See *30 Days, Year XXVII. No 6/7 2009, p. 40-41).*

In the recent past, I have had a chance of gazing at His Love for us in the film "*The Passion*" by Gibson. In this film we learn that sacrificial love, then, is not giving up the world. It is a continuation of that transaction in which Christ says to us: "*Give me your humanity and I will give you my Divinity. Give me your time, I will give you my Eternity, give me your bonds; I will give you my freedom. You give me your death, I will give you my life, give me your nothingness, I will give you my All*". All in all, the most consoling thing is that all this, asked for by Jesus, does not require much time. It only requires much love. The more intense our love is involved, the less we may think of the sacrifice involved.

### ***Our Love in the Community***

Normally, human beings do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. For us Priests instead, people love us



beyond measure, in season and out of season. There is a big hand of God's love in their love for us. They do not love us merely because of our good works or our merits, but simply because of what we are: *"God's Priests are their religious Lawyers before the Almighty"*. This I have personally lived in the past 25 years of my Priestly Ministry. Our people pray for us and each one of them feels like having a share in our presence, our identity and our work. Each one of them longs to belong to each one of us totally; and we too are expected to belong to each of them wholly.

The wording locally used by Christians, *"Our Priest"*, *"Our Brother"* or *"Our Sister,"* when addressing us, is not misplaced pride! We are theirs: including the children, youth, adults, the aged, the sick and all people of different abilities and classes alike! It is this true image of love for them that removes the distorted old view of "expecting the lay people to simply *pray, pay and obey*" (cf. LG.37). "We are supposed to lead our communities into the unity of charity, and of loving one another with mutual affection" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter proclaiming the Year for Priests 2009*).

Priests ought to remember always St. Thomas of Vinanova's assertion: "Experience shows us every day that a Priest of moderate learning, but full of love, converts more souls than many learned Priests without love". *Sequitur esse agere*: We transmit waves of what we are. A Jewish psychiatrist once said to a Bishop: *"Keep telling your people that God loves them. Most of the problems I deal with come from people who believe no one loves them"* (T. Dollan., *Priests for the Third Millennium*, 43).

Our people want and desire equal accessibility to our presence and service. This is why whenever they see anybody standing in between their love for their Priest, Brother, or Sister they are agitated. They want our love to be shared as 'bread that is broken'! It is very interesting to see that in mentioning the Evangelical Counsel of Chaste Celibacy during the Rite of Ordination the reason given for it is: *"So that you may look at all as your children"*.

It is easier to "stay out" than "get out!" I remember conducting a Retreat in one of the rural Parishes in Lugazi Diocese and a young lady put up her hand and asked question me: *"Father, but why don't you Catholic Priests marry?"*. I simply told her that the answer was in her very question: *"If you call me your Father, can you then proceed to ask me why I do not marry you?"* If there is such a thing as 'gender equity', then we must also here speak of 'Celibate-love equity'!

***Growth in Joyful Love***

The love we give away is the only love we keep. We are blessed to have Associations of Priests, Religious or Lay Christians; which bring us together as a family. Nonetheless, these are external. The circulating love of Priests, of the Religious or Christians for one another, is deeper than the Associations by Canon Law or Regional demarcations of the nature of a Deanery. The first medium of priestly growth is the Holy Sacrifice of Mass. Then follows the duty to love the Beloved Ones of Jesus: God the Father, The Holy Spirit, Mother Mary, his Mother, the Saints, Spiritual writers, the needy of all kinds including the sick, prisoners, and the Holy Souls in Purgatory. We are to grow in love through our personal experience of Him, to the point that we do not communicate a mere ideology of Christianity, but we communicate with a living divine Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. To accept all the painful moments of our sacrificial love: Our emotional experiences, our frustrations, failures, the constantly demanding people, the misunderstandings, tension and disappointments in our Ministry, all these ought to be seen as part of this journey of love and growth.

One particular 'patient' narrates the story of his experience of the joy and love of returning to the Church after several years of meandering in the spiritual desert: *"When I was in my early twenties, I drifted from the Church, never completely abandoning her, but floating in and out. I would feel the urge to return, and I'd go to Mass, then drift away again for a while, only to repeat the cycle many times over the years. The guilt was awful. After far too many years I did return, and it was truly one of the most joyous days of my life. I cried as I have only cried maybe twice in my life, for remorse, shame, and then with much joy. When Father blessed me and absolved me of my sins...He said to me, 'All the Angels and Saints in Heaven rejoice today, at your return.'* There are no words to express how I felt. Only a Priest can bring that kind of peace and joy, because only to him is granted that authority by Jesus. What an amazing gift the Priesthood truly is to us".

One Chaplain narrates his experience of the joy and love from the presence of the Sisters of Mother Theresa to the patients they served in India: *"I used to assist at a home for those dying of AIDS patiently being taken care of by the Sisters of Mother Theresa. One day, these Sisters called me to baptize one of the dying patients. 'Do you know Jesus?' I asked? 'I know nothing about the Catholic Church. In fact I have hated Religion all my life. All I know is that for three months I have been here dying,*

*these Sisters are always joyful! When I curse them they look at me with compassion in their eyes, and when they clean my sores they are smiling. When they spoon feed me, there is radiance in their eyes. All I know is that they have joy and I don't, when I ask them in desperation why they are so happy, all they answer is 'Jesus'. I want to receive this Jesus! Baptize me, give me this Jesus! Give me this Joy!'"*

*In a book, "Catholic Tourism", this is what we find: "We started in northern Germany and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, we entered the South, Bavaria. The Tour Guide commented: 'You will notice a big change now. Up North people work hard, there is a lot of industry and the people are sober! Down here look at the flowers, painted homes, smiling people, lots of children, good food, dancing, and song' she concluded! The North is more Protestant and the South is more Catholic" (T. Dollan, p.201).*

### **The Good News: The Source of Our Joyful Love**

We are Official Ministers of the Good News. The Gospel is Joyful News and so must we who bring it across to others. We must be joyful people. In St. Luke's Institute in Maryland, USA a Treatment Center for Priests with some special challenges, 1,286 Priests were asked to talk about their experience of Priesthood. Those who said, *"I am happy as a Priest,"* were 90 percent and those who said, *"I would still choose Priesthood,"* were 80 percent and only Six percent were thinking of leaving. Could any other profession match those numbers?

*"A cheerful glance brings joy to the heart; good news invigorates the bones" (Pr.15:30).* The Manifesto of Jesus is none other than the joyful news of Liberation: *"To bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, a year of acceptance of the Lord" (Lk.4:18-19).* At the end of the Blessings of the Beatitudes Jesus says to us: *"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven" (Mt. 5:12).* God protects and empowers us in the proclamation of this Good News because whenever we help convert a soul to Him, joy is infinitely immense in Heaven. One soul joyfully brought back to the Creator is as if we have brought the whole world back to Him, just as losing one soul is comparable to God's losing of the 'whole world'.

We Priests are largely joyful people because our Vocation is not a selection but a choice; and not by human merit but by His love. We are chosen to proclaim the Good News. Fr. J. Nouwen in his book, *"The Genesee Diary"*, gave a wonderful answer to the question as to why one becomes a Priest or a Religious Brother or Sister. For him the best answer is: *"Because in the face of Divine Providence, I had to become a Priest or Religious!"* All the other answers we may give are horizontally oriented, not transcendental. For example, "I wanted to become holier, or I wanted to serve God's people etc". It all depends on Him who chose us: "You did not choose me, but I chose you!" That God called me and wants to use me as I am: *"Gratia super naturam"* is an everlasting gift to me. Just as at creation God does not create masses. He knows, loves, cares for each one of us by name, and thus knows us as individuals.

In the Archdiocesan Synod, Questionnaires were sent throughout the recent Kampala Archdiocese on various themes. Regarding vocations was a question: *"What should we do to increase vocations?"* Many of our people answered: *"Let those who are there in the Priesthood or Religious Life, show us that they are happy about what they are!"* It would be a great lack if I, a Priest or Religious, were to give the world the impression that our Priestly or Religious Ministry is nothing but 'sufferings'. In fact, "our joy as Priests and Religious has nothing to do with where we are assigned, what we are doing, or with recognition. It mainly depends on who we are, and not on what we do, or what we have" (cf. Timothy Dollan, p.207).

### **The Love 'Given' to Us**

Our trust in Divine Providence increases our inner freedom and leads to joyful love. I have personally enjoyed profound live-friendship and -support from many of my fellow Priests. This has been a decisive support in the various challenges and a valuable helps in the growth of my Priestly Ministry. If I can trust a fellow Priest, a relative or a friend; why not trust God who called me from home and from other programs to send me proclaim the Good News of joyful love to His people?

Too much worry is a sin against Faith. It is as if I make myself the one responsible for the sustenance of the whole world! In our Pastoral Ministry we often meet 'our' simple people who are very poor, suffering, lacking many things, but joyful. Working or

serving 'miserably' does also reduce the joy of those around us. It calls into motion many experiences of negative thinking, and of the difficult past; while also at the same time it predicts a negative future. One American Priest narrates his experience of love from the people to us Priests and Religious: "On Holy Thursday 2002, at the height of the sexual abuse crisis, St. Louis Priests gathered for the Chrism Mass ... As we walked in procession, more than 2000-strong applauding Lay People were holding signs that read: 'We support our Priests' 'We love our Priests'. Did we deserve that outpouring of love and support? We knew we did not, but we were grateful nonetheless. I cannot have been the only Priest whose eyes were moist".

We all do well to go back to our special solemnity on Ordination day. Very free, very zealous, and joyful! What with the 'bless me with your dustless hands' experience! Wise are those who learn that "the bottom line doesn't always have to be their top priority" (William Arthur Ward). That joy of the Divine Grace of Ordination supports us on our Priestly and Religious Pilgrimage amidst the common and extraordinary challenges of our life. It is good to oftentimes look at one's Video-Cover or Ordination-Album of the ceremony of Ordination so as to regain our primary joyful love which we had during and soon after Ordination.

I must say I am someone who is much 'kinder' than I may seem to look for from the outside. I know how to love deeply and perhaps this is why at times my joyful countenance is at times confused with the seriousness with which I may handle issues. I like jokes, I think am charitable, and I always endeavor to strive for the well-being of others. Perhaps in the Enneagram I would be the No.7 with a strong wing in No. 2. I have run the temporal goods of the Church in relationship with joy and love; I have tried to share with those in need. I hate seeing some-one suffer, whether I can help or not. One time, I had wanted to join the Missionaries of the Poor so that I could bring more love and joy to the poor whom they serve. It did not work out, but up till now I am an Associate Member of their Congregation. Indeed God, who is Love must have loved me as I struggle to reciprocate His LOVE.

### ***Love is Eternity***

One time in the USA, we were driving by a cemetery in Kansas with my Priest-friend who said to me, "Deogratias, over 10 Priests are

*buried here. Do you know what Deogratias, no body is more dead than a dead Priest". He was here referring to the fact of "No children or grand children: a simple life.*

And so we depart, but having enriched the joy and love of hundreds of thousands of people with our Ministry. John Mary Vianney was considered low-grade as a Priest and thus sent to the most rural and remote Parish. Today he is the model of Priestly Ministry. Most of those who give birth to children physically often die miserable, lacking hope, in despair, and are never heard of there-after!!!

There is also the joy of the Pastoral Ministry. Like Priests everywhere, I have witnessed miracles of God's grace in the people we serve. One small example: Not many years ago a man came into my Confessional bruised and broken from a failed marriage. He was then one of our CEO Catholics (Christmas and Easter Only Catholic); today he is a daily Communicant and a frequent Penitent. This is more than the mere giving birth to a physical son. His story is by no means a unique experience of joy today. Our joy is for the unseen reality: hope, salvation, conquering sin of the world, consecration, mysteries of faith, Eternity! In Rome earlier, whenever you would come to the simple white grave of Pope John Paul II bellow St. Peters' Basilica, you could not believe he was the great man of the world who touched so much Africa and all humanity. But the cry of the Christians on the day of his burial could not but silently keep resonating in your head, *"Santo subito, "Saint at Once"!*

# Chapter VII

## Eternity: The Reward

Death is more universal than life because everyone dies but not everyone fully lives. Every year, it is said, about sixty million people die world- wide. These are from the earlier mentioned over seven billion inhabitants of the world. Every one of these people is destined either for an everlasting absence of God: Hell, or for an everlasting perfect joy by staying with Him in Heaven. But on the other hand, all these calculations may be wrong. It may well be that God does not have to judge at all, but everyone is his or her own arbitrator when standing before the Absolute Goodness of the Almighty. Such a revelation must be during that moment when one's life lies before one in its entirety, made clear and sharp in every detail in the light of He who is Light.

### The gift of death

Yes, either way, we shall live forever. Eternity is our daily '**now**' on earth and our '**forever**' is composed of many '**nows**'. Love is something eternal; an aspect of it may change but not its essence. Eternity does not begin after death but is going on all the time in our 'right now'. Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending. Life has no meaning the moment we lose the sense of being 'eternal'. The real joy of a rose is that it blossoms and then goes.

An American novelist Tom Robbins says, "*Stay committed to your decisions, but stay flexible in your approach.*" The grace to *Eternity* calls for our daily 'walking of our talk'. We can adjust the approach in the various events of life on our way, but we must always have a sense of that Divine North: Eternity. I remember one time talking to an old Franciscan Italian priest in



Copertino, Lecce by the names of Father Egidio. He, at the end of our conversation, said to me: *"Tell the people in the Missions in Africa never to lose the sense of Heaven, for Mother Mary is waiting for all of them in Paradise."*

### **Our Daily Walk to Death**

In R. Covey Steven's book: *"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People"*; in the third chapter the title is: *Begin with the End!* St. Benedict says that every good Benedictine ought to pray and work with 'death always in front of him'. Yes, *"intuition is the clear conception of the whole at a glance. To dream of anything I want is a beautiful gesture of the human mind, to do something that I want is the strength of the human will, and to trust in myself and to test my limits is the courage to succeed"* (Bernhard Edmonds). All this leads us into deep humility in our connection to the 'divine network' of our life. When we connect to the Divine Satellite, we then learn to focus more on eternity than on death.

Death is just a door way to our final end. *"The day which we fear as our last, is but the birthday to eternity"* (Seneca). St. Paul connects this very well to the reality when he says: "I have finished the course, I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness; which the Lord, the righteous Judge will recompense me in that day. And not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing" (**2 Timothy 4:7-8**).

Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago (R.I.P), having made it public that he had terminal cancer, was asked by the media people how he felt since he was about to cross over to Eternity. He explained that he compared what he thought of as awaiting him, to his childhood memories of the Toscana Mountains, his place of origin. He could see a well prepared environment waiting for him, but not yet in the here and now.



Death is the final departure from this world in order to receive that Everlasting Welcome by our loving Father in Eternity. Just as every day brings us nearer to the grave so does it prepare us for Eternity! Our theories of the Eternal are as valuable as are those of a chick which has not broken its way through its shell. What does the chick in an egg make of the outside world?

At the closure of his pastoral visit to Portugal recently, Pope Benedict XVI said: *The "indispensable mission of every ecclesial community" is "to receive from God and to offer to the world the Risen Christ, so that every situation of weakness and of death may be transformed, through the Holy Spirit, into an opportunity for growth and life."*

It is amazing to see that we come from Eternity in God to appear in time at creation and birth and we again are destined to return to Eternity either, at our worst, to 'eternal Hell' or, for our best, into Paradise! We are meant to live forever either in joyful love with God or without Him. Either way we still 'are'. However in Hell we are as good as dead - the second death described in The Book of Revelation .... St. Augustine at the death of her mother St. Monica writes to God: *"Lord, I do not ask you why you have taken her away from me but I thank you for having given her to us!"*

*"The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity - greedy, dishonest, adulterous - or even like this tax Pharisee. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income..." (Lk. 18: 9-14).* It is interesting to see that we may sin even in Prayer! That even in confession we may go just to report others while hiding our own personal guilt away from the awaiting Mercy of God. Fr. Albert Herod (OSB) forewarns us: *"It has always been the prerogative of true death to give man the major surprise of his life. No matter how much one may speculate, the actual event of final passing will, at all times, be entirely different from anything one might think, say or write about. As everyone's life is unique, so is each one's death."*

Like the Pharisee, our true conversion to the Grace of Eternity fails the moment we make a litany of our merits and begin comparing it with a catalogue of what we think are the weaknesses and failures of others. We have, at times, attended some monthly recollections or annual retreats, and it is easy to carry within us such attitude that whatever is said by the preacher as challenging belongs to others and not to our good self, the righteous self. This is deep down what the original sin of Adam and Eve is about.

Pride many times tempts us to feel as if God does no longer see things as they ought to be. I become my own power: my own Creator and my Almighty. The good Angels fell, our ancestors Adam and Eve failed because they had had the promise of becoming like God: "*You will be like gods.*" Jesus in the desert, at the temptation of the devil, is tested against the identity of His Father twice: "*If you are the Son of God*". It is important to note that in all the three times of tempting, Jesus quotes the Scripture, "*For it is written ...*" (**Mt. 4: 1-11**).

In life we soon discover that it is when we 'sit down' that we get to 'see up'. The journey to Eternity, which is meant to be our daily walk, requires simplicity and humility. Simplicity, which is 'simplex', is opposed to being a 'duplex', and it is supposed to mean: 'Just looking at things the way they are'. Humility from *Humus* in Latin, which means 'soil' in English, suggests getting "'own to the ground'; so it is a kind of settling down on the ground in order to see things in the right way.

### **The last will**

Every person of age prepares what he or she would have liked to be the living mind or heart left behind by him or her after death. I have, on several occasions, seen the chancellors of dioceses call the relatives of the deceased priests to read them the last will of the deceased. Unfortunately, most of the

relatives are only eager to hear how their late priest relative divided his property among them.

I got some extracts from the last will of Silverdene Emblem:

*I, SILVERDENE EMBLEM O'NEILL..realize the end of my life is near, do hereby bury my last will and testament in the mind of my Master. He will not know it is there until after I am dead. Then, remembering me in his loneliness, he will suddenly know of this testament, and I ask him then to inscribe it as a memorial to me. I have little in the way of material things to leave. ..There is nothing of value I have to bequeath except my love and my faith. These I leave to all those who have loved me, to my Master and Mistress. One last word of farewell,..whenever you visit my grave, say to yourselves with regret but also with happiness in your hearts at the remembrance of my long happy life with you: "Here lies one who loved us and whom we loved." No matter how deep my sleep I shall hear you, and not all the power of death can keep my spirit from wagging a grateful tail. <sup>24</sup>*

I have also prepared my last will and would like to share it with you: It reads:

*"All I have belongs to the Church and during my Funeral Mass I ask that the Alleluia Chorus by Handel be played or sung prominently."*

My only property is my will to say no or yes.

Did Jesus make his last will? Yes. To us he said: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (**Jn: 13:34**) and to his heavenly Father he prayed: "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" (**Lk 23:46**) or "It is finished" (**Jn 19:31**).

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<sup>24</sup> Tao House, December 17th, 1940.

We should never fear to make our last wills, for this is one of the personal writings from our hearts with which we move towards our final destiny: heaven.

### **Our strategy for heaven**

Heaven is full of sinners who humiliated themselves and converted back to God; while 'eternal hell' is full of saints, who once they sinned became too proud to settle down on the ground and repent!

It was humility that moved the Prodigal Son to go back to his father: *"Let me go to my father, I will tell him that I have sinned against heaven and against You, I am not worthy any longer to be called Your son; treat me as one of your servants"* (**Lk. 15: 18**). A proud person would have simply said, *"Father I fell among brigands soon after I left with the property."*

Yes, humility is in seeing and telling the truth, while pride is in hiding the truth and 'enjoy' telling lies. At times, some people who are hurt by others do fail for long to get healed. These people often become bitter. They thus ruin their personalities. This is why a personal and explicit confession of sins is so important in one's life. It is also common to find people who have confessed their sins, and who know that their sins have been forgiven, but the wounds have not been healed. They may be blind to the fact that personal responsibility in such cases is still called for. I think in this connection that it is a big mistake today to replace confession with counseling, which is largely a result of the innate longing for the Sacrament of Penance which our brothers and sisters the Protestants in particular and the Savedees and Pentecostals in general dropped when they separated from the Catholic Church.

St. Peter was touched by Divine Grace in a very special way (**Mt. 26:75**). *"...And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the words that Jesus had spoken: 'Before the cock crows you will deny me three times'. He went out and began to weep bitterly."*

**(Mt.26:26-27)**. Yes, our conversion from a life long-time bad habit may happen from a simple natural event. Imagine Peter's conversion happening from a simple cry or crow of a cock.

Simple events in life like watching a TV program, a priest's hearing of some confession, visiting a dying sick person, a simple comment during a conversation, the reading a book, etc., may trigger off our life-long conversion.

I am here reminded of a small boy who had his eldest sister who happened to be frequented by a boy-friend in the evenings, yet this was the very time when the good child badly wanted his sister's assistance for doing his home work. So, one time, the little boy hid in the very spot where his sister used to meet the boy-friend. When the boy-friend arrived the little boy asked him, *"You boy do you not have your own sister at home to converse with? At this time I also need my sister to assist me with my Home Work"*. The big boy was beaten by the innocence with which this little angel made the inquiry. He never came back again! The 'cock had crowed!' like one day it did for St. Peter.

Remember the story I told you earlier of my train trip from Rome to Padua, in Northern Italy when I dozed off while reading my Breviary. On waking up, one old lady told me:-

*"Padre (Father), thank you for that moment of prayer. I saw you deep in the Holy Spirit in Meditation there where you were seated. You preferred prayer to our normal conversations (in Italian Chiachere). You Priests in the Missions are holy people of God. Pray for me for I lost my husband five months ago. Take these Mass Intentions and remember him and me in your meditation!"*

She gave me some real good money for those Mass Intentions as the Church arrangement predisposes. The lesson from this serious lady was more than our College monthly recollection. This lady did make my 'cock crow' with respect to my Breviary obligations. Simple or big events in life may surely cause long-lasting conversions.

There is no substitute for love except 'more love'! Love **cures** people -- both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it. At times, reconciliation and reparation are sweeter than an unbroken relationship. Love is a condition in which the happiness of another person may lead to the 'cock's crowing', like once it did for St. Peter. Life is made in such a way that we are meant to be constantly organizing instead of agonizing.

### **The Need for Reparation**

One Friday in November 2008, in South Africa, we were at table with a Benedictine Old Priest. He talked about the couples he was going to wed the following day on Saturday and concluded sadly: *"And then you will hear, very soon, that they have divorced. They will, because in our world today, we hardly repair. These days, shoes, cloths, home and office items are no longer repaired but thrown away. When two people are in conflict, they just evade each other instead of coming down to talk over it!"*

Yes, that is the challenge of our lives today with regard to reparation. Yes, "if you can't repair your brakes, at least make sure your horn makes louder noise". This 'Preparing' again must be in the 'now': for one step at a time is enough. Do not look back and grieve over the past for it is gone; and do not be troubled about the future, for it has not yet come. The secret is to live in the **present**, and make that present so beautiful that it will be worth remembering.

Reparation is originally a noun from Latin: *re-parare*, meaning to "prepare again". It is a reformation for my past sins. We can do it through our daily simple practices like pilgrimages, indulgences, Masses offered etc. Reparation is the desire to bridge or even to completely remove the gap created between us and God as well as within ourselves between us and neighbour and, thus, developing a huge burden of guilt from our past mistakes. Reparation calls for proper contrition, which means 'calling sin by its proper name'. Then we may be able to use our past failures

as a stepping stone to growth in virtue! Heaven is largely full of those people who would have been in Hell but who repented and repaired and are now in blissful joy. Hell is full of those who would have been in Heaven but were too satisfied and too proud to repent and repair.

*"For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones. We earnestly desire each of you to demonstrate the eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end" (Heb. 6: 10-11).* As indicated earlier, the book, Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,* on 'Modern Management', has *"Begin with the End"* as its third chapter. Yes, if in whatever we do as priests, religious or lay people, we kept in mind that final vision and the end of our life, our lives would be very different: They would be much better.

St. Paul meant what he wrote when he said: *"I have completed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance" (2Tim 4:7-8).* All humanity was created for the **Final End** with God in Heaven. This Heaven I wish to compare with many Insurance Policies. If you have faithfully been paying for the last 24 years but unfortunately you fail to pay for in the 25<sup>th</sup> year, even if you have never faltered in your early payments, you will not be considered, if you get an accident after that 25<sup>th</sup> year.

We are simple servants of God, offering 'sacrifices' and supplication on our pilgrimage to Eternity. Time is soon coming when we meet face to face with the One to whom we now offer our sacrifices. This is what is meant by the text: *"I saw no temple in that city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev 21:22).* Saint Paul calls it: *"...the things which no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).* This

is why the Resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals to us the clearest insight into the 'Being' of God. The more we know God, the more we know of our own lives too. Eternal life is this: "*To know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (Jn. 17:3).

### **The grace to eternity**

I like very much the Psalm: "*Lord, show us the shortness of our life that we may gain the wisdom of heart*" (Ps. 90:12). I have learnt of some trees which live for over 1,300 years, but our life-span as a human being is not even one quarter of that. Why? In my past 25 years of my priesthood, I have attended over 100 funerals! If one listens to just one half of what is said in most of those funeral eulogies, one would be under the impression that all the burials we attend are of 'saints' at least for a couple of minutes!

In my home area in local language Luganda there is a practice of normally saying, "*We have lost a man (or woman) who will never be replaced*". Let it here be observed that metaphysically there is nothing special in the above statement, for each one of us is an individual who cannot be replaced. On the other hand, this same statement may easily refer to 'being able to replace a person who is very bad in character or identity!'

Surely, in all these cases, none of these deceased would ever have heard such words of praise about them during their lifetime. And obviously it is impossible for the dead person to correct anything wrong that is said at the time. One is completely at the mercy of the mourners. The raw truth of it all is this: After a few months, one is unceremoniously forgotten unless s/he is a Saint, a Michelangelo, a Shakespeare, a Mozart or a Hitler ...

One idea has kept coming back to my mind during funeral celebrations: If we do not work for Eternity, how else are we to meet again with our dear Departed Brethren? Yes, Eternity is the summary of what God has been for us here on earth and the measure



of how much we have accepted to collaborate with Him in the drama of life.

One time, while I was walking by the cemetery of Bukalasa Seminary, I meditated about the miserable tombs there, of the 'great men' who made those first experiences of Missionary activity in Southern Uganda: Mere simple stones heaped together. And for many, even those stones are already scattered and are not sufficient. If it were not our lasting home in Eternity, one could easily see that 'they' would have lost it all! I did several times visit the simple holy tomb of Pope John Paul II, when in Rome. So great a Pope with such a simple grave!

### **The Power of 'Now'**

St. Thomas knew time as the *Nunc Fluens* (The flowing now)! There is no other time except 'this time', and hence, the power of **now**! This very 'flowing moment' is used by some to become Saints, it is thus turned into a *kairos*. Others use the same 'flowing moment' for sinning. Heaven is our **present moment** well lived here on earth. We just have to do the ordinary things extraordinarily. "*Some souls win peace and Holiness from the same trials which make others nervous*" (Fulton Sheen, *Lift up your Heart*, p.147).

Every moment at our disposal brings us more treasures than we can possibly gather. The great value of the 'Now', spiritually viewed, is that it carries a message God has directed personally for us... "*Those who sanctify the present moment in love and offer it up in union with God's will, will never become frustrated, will grumble less, and complain less*" (Fulton Sheen, *Lift up your Heart*, pp.144,145). To accept the duty of this moment for God is to touch Eternity and to escape the vicissitudes of time.

I remember in 2000, when I was taken in theatre for a minor operation at Nsambya St. Francis of St. Raphael Hospital. When the doctor came to operate, my pressure had risen very high, but

he managed to use anaesthesia on only the part of my body being operated on. When I came out of the theatre, I remembered moments I had preached about eternity. I asked myself then, why I was so afraid to embrace it at the theatre. In sanctifying the present moment, the today or now of our life, the bitter and the sweet, the joys and the sorrows of each moment are viewed as the raw materials of sanctity. Every event now becomes a mystery because it shows Divine Will. Nothing is insignificant or dull. Everything can be sanctified (**Rom 8:28**).

### **Living the Final End**

In Luganda, a proverb goes: *a tree normally falls in the direction of its inclination*. At the burial Mass of the late Monsignor John Kalule, the late Bishop J. Mukwaya told us that the former, when dying at Lubaga hospital, cried out: *Jesus, my Jesus, my Jesus!* A nurse nearby laughed and said to him, if you feel pain you should call for the doctor not Jesus whom you do not see. The Monsignor died with the above words on his lips. I have come to believe in life that, if we all lived in terms of our final end, this world would be a better locus. One woman of our time whom I have admired is Chiara Lubich who, during one of her last years joyfully said: *when we shall be in the Father's house, we shall be happier and able to intercede for the remaining brethren here on earth in a deeper way*.

The Bishop informed us of an uncle of his who was quarrelsome. At the time of death, he called the family members and began complaining about each of them, and in this very act he died. Another lady was so grateful during her life that she expressed deep thanks even for minor things. When she was admitted to hospital, at her time of death, she called all the nurses around her and the niece who was looking after her and began thanking all of them for the love and care and doing so, she died. I remember one of our good sacristans who, during the Eucharistic

adoration, always audibly asked Jesus to let him die on Good Friday. He died on Good Friday!

The late Monsignor W. Mpuuga was one of my greatest instructors in the faith, especially in liturgy. Whenever he woke up in the morning, he tied up his bed (mattress and sheet beds) and put it aside. When asked the reason, he answered that he was ready to be called from this world at any moment and thus was not sure whether he would come back to sleep; then why leave the bed prepared? That he came back to make it through another night was always a surprise for him, a new gift from God. *Yes, a tree normally falls in the direction of its inclination.*

### **Surrendering All to God**

St. Ignatius of Loyola composed the famous *Suscipe Domine*, which was a prayer of his total submission to God:

**Take, O Lord, and receive, My entire liberty, my memory, My understanding and my whole will, All that I am and all that I possess, You have given me, I surrender it all to You, To be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace, With these I will be rich enough, And will desire nothing more.**

From the time we sang the Latin version of this text in the minor seminary in 1976, I have gradually fused my mind and heart into this life philosophy of self abandonment to Divine Providence. I surrender, submit, let him drive and daily pray: "...thy will be done...", especially during Holy Mass, when praying the 'Our Father...'; with my two raised hands up to Him.

Archbishop Fulton Joseph Sheen says that there shall surely be three big surprises when we come to Heaven: One, that we do not find there those whom we expected to be there: Two, that we find there those whom we did not expect to be there, and Lastly that

each one of us, in spite of our sinfulness and unworthiness, we would find that we are there. "Only barbarians are not curious about where they come from, how they came to be where they are, where they appear to be going, whether they wish to go there, and if so, why, and if not, why not" (Isaiah Berlin).

The Latin people say, "Live your own life, for you will die your own death". May our loving Father continue to uphold our faith and hope for Eternity as we proclaim it every Holy Saturday in the Easter Song referred to in Latin as the **EXULTET**:

**Accept this Easter candle, a flame divided but undimmed, a pillar of fire that glows to the honor of God. Let it mingle with the lights of heaven and continue bravely burning to dispel the darkness of this night! May the Morning Star which never sets, find this flame still burning: Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed his peaceful light on all mankind, your Son, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.**

In the Creed we announce our Faith in Jesus Christ, "His only Son, our Lord...He ascended to Heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead...the Resurrection of the body and Everlasting Life." Is this not the reason why we were created? Is this not the reason why we are living and working so hard here on earth?

Let us, in amazement of this 'My Lord and God', sing together with Handel in his last part of the Alleluia Chorus as we daily practice our ascent to embrace Abba, Father:

**"...And He shall reign forever and ever,  
King of kings! And Lord of lords!  
And He shall reign forever and ever,**

**King of kings! And Lord of lords!**

**Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!...**

**Hallelujah! Hallelujah!". AMEN!**