



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE SHRINE OF NAMUGONGO

HOMILY OF PAUL VI

Uganda, 2 August 1969

Most beloved sons and daughters,

Christian Youth of Uganda!

And you, Venerable Brothers,

Bishops and Priests!

Men and Women Religious, Catechists,

Lay Men and Women of Catholic Action!

Christian Brethren of every denomination!

You, also, the Civil Authorities present here today, to whom We are particularly thankful for your courteous welcome and the honour of your attendance!

Our greetings and Our blessings to all of you!

Be assured that We have all of you present in Our prayer during this holy rite.

At this moment, it is all of Africa that We consider symbolically participating in this sacred ceremony, because We intend to offer it to Christ for all of Africa, for its prosperity, for its peace, for its salvation!

And to the young men and women, the catechumens, and the children here present, symbols of the new Africa, We now address this brief discourse in a special way.

I ask this question of you, beloved sons and daughters:

Why have I come to Africa, to Uganda, and right here to Namugongo?

I have come to do honour to your Martyrs. Here is being raised a Sanctuary to the glory of the Lord in their memory; and I decided to come from Rome to bless the altar of this Sanctuary. My intention is to venerate also, by this act, all those other Christians who have given their lives for the Catholic Faith in Africa, here and everywhere.

But, you will ask me, why should the Martyrs be honoured?

And I answer you: It is because they have performed the most heroic, and therefore the greatest and most beautiful of all actions; they have, as I said, laid down their lives for their Faith, that is, for their religion and for the freedom of their conscience. Therefore they are our champions, our heroes, our teachers. They teach us how real Christians should be. Listen to me now: Should a Christian be a coward? Should he be afraid? Should he betray his own Faith? No! Of course not! Your Martyrs teach us just how true Christians should be, especially young Christians, African Christians. For Christians must be courageous, they must be strong, they must, as Saint Peter wrote, "be firm in the faith" (*1 Pet. 5, 9*). Your Martyrs teach us how much the Faith is worth! But, you ask me, is Faith worth more than life?

Yes, indeed! Faith is more valuable than our present life, which is a mortal life; whereas Faith is the beginning of the immortal life of happiness, that is, of the life of God in us. Do you know this most important truth? You answer: Yes! because you have learned that Faith is accepting the Word of God; and whoever accepts the Word of God begins to live of God Himself.

Now, you may ask me: Is Faith enough, to be living in God and to be saved?

But you know your Catechism: Faith is indeed necessary; but it is not enough. Together with Faith, you need grace, you need the Holy Spirit, you need that great Sacrament which makes us Christians, the Sacrament of Baptism; and then you also need the other Sacraments, which make us live as sons of God, as brothers of Christ, as tabernacles of the Holy Spirit-which make us good and holy-which make us members of the Church-which make us meritorious of Heaven. The Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist, the most mysterious, but also the holiest and most life-giving of all the Sacraments, gives us Jesus Christ Himself; sacrificing Himself for us, He made Himself into living bread for our souls.

Well, then, you may say, it is a fine thing to be Christians!

Yes, indeed, beloved sons and daughters, it is a very fine thing. I would like this idea to remain deeply impressed in your memory, or rather, in your conscience, forever: it is a very fine thing to be Christians! Pay attention, however-It is a very fine thing, but it is not always an easy thing. Look at your own Martyrs. They had to suffer for their faithfulness to Christ. One who is a Christians must live according to his Faith; then it can happen that his attachment to his Faith demands sacrifice-sometimes, it requires great sacrifices-but, most often, it only demands many little

sacrifices made frequently; but these sacrifices are precious, full of noble manly vigour; they make life strong and virtuous, they keep it pure and honest, they turn it always towards love: to the love of God, which is the first thing we must do; then to the love of other men, especially those nearest to us, our neighbour, and so to the love of all human beings, good and bad, near and far.

So then, you ask me again, to be Christians is important for our present life, since it obliges us to love everyone, and to do good to all of society?

Exactly so, is my reply. The Christian life is of great importance even for our earthly life; it is of importance for all human activity, and for all living together in society: for the family, the school, for work; for peace between all social classes, between the tribes, between the nations. Everywhere, it promotes good, it demands freedom, it asks for justice; it takes care of the weak, the poor, the suffering, and even of its enemies, and of the dead. For the Christian life, when it truly has Christ in its heart, is like a fountain of goodness and love, overflowing on all sides in good (cf. *Jn.* 4, 14).

Perhaps you now ask me a final question; you ask:

How can we live well our Christian Faith?

Here, then, is how I would summarize all that I would wish to say to you:

First, have great love for Jesus Christ; try to know Him well, remain united to Him, have great Faith and great trust in Him. Second, be faithful to the Church, pray with her, love her, make her known, and always be ready, as your Martyrs were, to bear frank witness to her. Third, be strong and courageous; be content; be happy and joyful always! Because, remember this always, the Christian life is a most beautiful thing! (cf. *Phil.* 4, 4).