



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II ON OCCASION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE HOLY MARTYRS OF UGANDA

To my Brother Bishops

and to the beloved priests, religious

*and faithful people of the Church in Uganda*As you celebrate the Centenary of the Holy Martyrs of Uganda, your illustrious ancestors in the faith, I wish to offer you my heartfelt greetings of peace and abiding joy. At this time I am spiritually close to all of you who are taking part in the celebrations commemorating the heroic sacrifice of those twenty-two Martyrs who shed their blood for the love of Christ. I am confident that the celebrations will serve to make the Martyrs better known and loved, while also providing a valuable opportunity for all of you to renew your Christian life in fidelity to your baptismal promises. I am pleased to join you in giving praise and thanks to our heavenly Father for the many graces and blessings that he has bestowed on the Ugandan people during the past hundred years since the Martyrs' deaths. In a special way I am grateful that the power of God's word has taken root in your hearts and many have embraced the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is in following Christ's example to the very end that the Martyrs gave the greatest testimony of love. Both in the way they lived and in the way they died there is so much for which to praise and thank God. In their lives they manifested an unshakeable faith in Christ, a deep attachment to his holy Gospel, a self-sacrificing love for one another, and a spirit of joy and forgiveness. It was their continual response to the Lord's love and grace that enabled them willingly to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. May the testimony of the Martyrs' lives and their total oblation inspire you in your own generous response to Christ. The witness to Christ once offered by the Holy Martyrs of Uganda constitutes a special challenge for you who are taking part in the Centenary celebrations. Through the Martyrs' example of heroic faith, can we not see Christ calling you today to repentance, deeper faith and reconciliation? This threefold challenge is indeed appropriate for the present time, considering the difficult and often painful circumstances in which you find yourselves as a result of years of bloodshed and violence. The Martyrs themselves underwent many forms of extreme cruelty, hatred and revenge; however, by placing their hope in Christ they were able to forgive their persecutors and to remain steadfast in their profession of faith. The heritage the Martyrs have left to you is the call to "believe in the Gospel". This call is repeated in every age. Ultimately it involves bringing your life ever more into harmony with the Gospel. It entails the concrete daily effort of putting off the old man and putting on the new; of overcoming in yourself what is of the flesh in order that what is of the spirit may triumph. You must rise above the things here below and "keep your eyes fixed on Jesus..." . The call to repentance and faith therefore involves a personal conversion that passes from the heart to deeds, that brings about the transformation of your whole life. The grace of conversion is a source of peace and a fountain of joy; for the interior transformation that it brings achieves reconciliation

with God, with oneself and with others. It overcomes the rejection of God which is sin and enables one to experience the true freedom of the children of God. This is the joy and peace that the Holy Martyrs experienced as they remained faithful to Christ, whatever the cost. I invite you, the members of the Church in Uganda, especially the young, to think about those twenty-two Martyrs, those strong and healthy young men. You, like them, are also strong for the struggle: not for the struggle of one against another in the name of some ideology or practice separated from the very roots of the Gospel, but strong for the struggle against evil: against everything that offends God, against every injustice and exploitation, against every falsehood and deceit, against everything that insults and humiliates, against everything that profanes human dignity and human relationship, against every crime against the sacred gift of human life: against every sin. Before you lies the task of building a new Uganda, on the foundation of love, reconciliation and true justice. Take up your responsibilities, for upon you depends the future of your country. Place your hope in Christ. He will enable you to bear your responsibilities for shaping a better world, one free of violence, discrimination and injustice. On this historic occasion in the life of the Church in Uganda I am praying that by following the witness of the Martyrs the mission of spreading the Gospel will be zealously shared by all of you. I entrust this celebration of the Centenary of the Holy Martyrs to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Martyrs. May she sustain you in the great task of making her Son ever better known and loved. As a pledge of strength and joy in our Lord Jesus Christ I impart my Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 21 May 1986.* **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II** © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana