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**Visit of His Eminence Card. Filoni to Uganda**

26-29 October 2017

**Meeting with Catechists and Teachers**

**at Munyonyo Uganda Martyrs’ Shrine**

Saturday, 28 October 2017

**1. Introduction.**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to meet you, particularly Catechists and Teachers, and to bring you a special Blessing of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, who, about two years ago, addressed you in this same place. I am here again, in Kampala, in order to join you all on this significant event of your particular Church, the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of this Archdiocese. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I would like to begin my remarks by expressing our deep thanks for your great contribution to the growth and spread of the Church in this nation. The role of catechists in Uganda has always been and remains a determinative force in the work of evangelization. Without your generous dedication, surely the growth of the Church would be much diminished in this country.

Thank you for all your work, for the sacrifice of yourselves and of your families, and for your devotion that people may know Jesus Christ. Thank you for being close to your people and for being able to speak to them words of encouragement that are addressed to the often difficult concrete situations of their lives. I pray that you will always have the resources and ongoing formation that equip you for announcing the Gospel and witnessing to Jesus Christ.

**2. Starting again with new enthusiasm: A vision for the future of the Church.**

Allow me to reiterate what I said yesterday to married couples. The Archdiocesan Golden Jubilee is a call for a beginning of a new era of the Catholic Church in Kampala. It is time to create new prospects. Such prospects should derive from this question: *What kind of Church and of society do I want today in Uganda, in the Archdiocese of Kampala*? Surely all of us want a Church according to the mind of Christ her founder; a Church that would get closer to the people; the Church capable of effectively addressing at least some of the major challenges facing most of the people and societies on the African continent, for instance, reconciliation, unity, justice, peace, Christian family, youth and their future, inter-religious dialogue, formation and education, wider and renewed impulse to evangelization, etc. This kind of the Church depends on you!

As you celebrate who you are today, you must at the same time renew your commitment to deeper evangelization; you have to re-embrace your evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm. As you well know, your mission consists mainly in proclaiming Christ’s message, participating in efforts to build community life, leading people in prayer and worship, motivating others to serve their neighbors, instruction and formation of conscience, etc.

Remember also that the service of charity is a constituent element of your vocation and mission. There are people in your parishes, particularly in the sprawling slums of the big cities, who are neglected by institutions or who feel like strangers in their own land. Often unemployed, they gain scarcely enough for a small meal a day. Some are too weak to move, some badly ill. They are left to feel unloved, without the dignity God bestowed on them. I ask you to go to them with the same love as you go to your own sisters and brothers. “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me.” Befriend them, lead your parish priests and curates to them so that they too may feel part of the Body of Christ and praise God for the fraternal love they receive. Get to know them, and then you will know better how to honor them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

**3. Coherence and authenticity of life: Our responsibilities.**

Dear catechists and teachers*,* coherence and authenticity of life is the first means of evangelization. Always remember that for many communities as well as for individuals you are the immediate and firsthand models of Christian life. To them, your way of life speaks louder than what you say during your Sunday services. For that reason, before you preach the word, you must make it your own and live by it. Before *doing* the catechesis, you must first of all *be* a catechist. Blessed Pope Paul VI eloquently taught us that: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”[[1]](#footnote-1). It would be sad if you did not practice what you preached and spoke about a God of whom you know just “by hearsay”, but with whom you had no contact.

The authenticity of life must manifest itself in various dimensions of your life. First of all*,* ***it must be seen and expressed in your personal relation with God***, that is, in the life of prayer, meditation of Sacred Scripture and in the fruitful reception of the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist and confession). On the occasion of his Apostolic Journey to Uganda in 1993, St. Pope John Paul II said to the Catechists: “Only if your ministry is nourished by prayer and sustained by genuine Christian living will it bear lasting fruit”[[2]](#footnote-2). You must, therefore, be examples of a faith that is rooted in a personal relationship to Jesus.

***Matrimonial life and family****.* Some of you are **married**. This is another dimension in which coherence and authenticity must be clearly seen. Married catechists are expected to bear witness constantly to the Christian value of matrimony, living the sacrament in full fidelity and educating their children with a sense of responsibility. Your marriage and your family at large can have great impact on your ministry, and it would be good for you to involve your spouse and children in the work entrusted to you by the Church, so that the whole family radiates apostolic witness.

**4. Catechists: Missionary awareness and apostolic zeal
“*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15).**

A catechist should constantly feel challenged by Christ’s mandate: “*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature*”. One is a catechist because he/she has been called to evangelize; to make Christ known, loved and followed by those who do not yet know Him and by the faithful themselves. According to our Lord’s missionary mandate, the Gospel has to be proclaimed to all people, men and women of all places and ages. So far, this mission in our times is still very far from what our Lord desires. This is also true with regard to this country; there are still many people in Uganda that need to hear the Good News. You should, therefore, permanently feel moved by Christ’s words: “*Other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these too I must lead*” (*Jn* 10:16). You should always try to be like the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep “*until he finds it*” (Lk 15:4).

As a result, the permanent awareness of your call to evangelize should be a source of *missionary and apostolic zeal*. Missionary zeal is the great enthusiasm we have for proclaiming the Gospel; a burning desire to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. A person with missionary zeal cannot help but talk about Jesus. Pope Francis is constantly warning Church ministers who are lacking in apostolic zeal, saying that such ministers are not useful, and that they do great harm to the Church. This is the sin of sloth (or laziness), which is a sin against apostolic zeal, against the desire to give the news of Jesus to others, which was given to us for free. Remember that to announce the Gospel is a great act of charity; it is a gift of love for our brothers and sisters in search of light.

**5. Promoting communion among the members of the community: The prophetic role of Catechists.**

As Catechists and teachers, you are called to be promoters of unity in your centres and outstations. Avoid all sorts of separation, tribalism and ethnic sentiments, in order to enhance ecclesial and national unity. Be welcoming to all without discrimination: rich and poor, native and foreign, Catholic and non-Catholic. Do not show partiality[[3]](#footnote-3). Teach people to overcome mistrust, to get over all hate and all resentment. Discord among Christians contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block and scandal to the world. In order to carry out her mission well, the Church must be a community of persons reconciled with God and among themselves. In this way, she can proclaim the Good News of reconciliation to contemporary society, which unfortunately experiences in many places conflicts, acts of violence, war and hatred[[4]](#footnote-4). If it is true that in Jesus Christ we belong to the same family and share the same life, there must no longer be hatred, injustice and ethnic conflicts.

Remember that two years ago, Pope Francis came to Africa as a Pilgrim of peace and reconciliation. On various occasions, He addressed the problem of tribal and ethnic conflicts. You need, therefore, to make the Holy Father’s massage keep burning and bear fruit. Do not let the Pope’s Visit be in vain. I pray that you will be ever greater promoters of unity and leaders in the service of dialogue and reconciliation!

**5. Conclusion.**

Dear Catechists and Teachers, as I conclude my remarks I gratefully evoke the glorious memories of your predecessors, especially Saints Andrew Kaggwa, Charles Lwanga, and Joseph Mkasa, together with the blessed Daudi Okelo and Jildo Irwa. I salute all of you, their worthy successors, and I encourage you to toil today with the same selflessness, the same apostolic courage and the same faith. May our Lady, Star of Evangelization, accompany each of you in your mission!

God bless you all!

1. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pope John Paul II, *Homily during the Eucharistic Celebration at the Shrine of the Holy Uganda Martyrs of Namugongo* (Sunday, 7 February 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 127 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Address during the Meeting with the special Council of the Synod for Africa*, Apostolic Nunciature of Yaoundé, 19 March 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)