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

26-29 October 2017

**Meeting with the Religious, Seminarians and Priests
at Ggaba National Major Seminary**

Friday, 27 October 2017

Dear Priests,
Dear Men and Women Religious,
Dear Seminarians,

**1. Introduction**

I was pleased to learn that the program of my Visit to Kampala included this opportunity of meeting you and sharing with you some reflections. This is in fact one of the best ways of getting in touch with the local Church: through her pastoral agents. You are the main protagonists in the life of the Church and her mission in Kampala. I wish, therefore, to thank His Excellency Archbishop Cyprian Kizito Lwanga and the Most Rev. Michael Blume, the Apostolic Nuncio to Uganda, for arranging and considering this meeting as one of the important moments of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. I congratulate each of you on this remarkable occasion and I thank you all for your tireless efforts in carrying out the Church’s mission of evangelization here in Kampala and beyond.

**2. Missionary Renewal**

One of my wishes for you on this occasion is that you come out of this Jubilee Year with a renewed pastoral and missionary spirit. Personal and ecclesial renewal is, in fact, one of the primary objectives of any Jubilee celebration. This event should be an opportunity to assess your pastoral and missionary fervor and, eventually, come up with fresh enthusiasm. You are the heirs of the great work of evangelization accomplished by Missionaries. Today this work is in your hands. You have the sacred duty to continue their work, each according to the call and grace received from God, whether as priests or consecrated persons.

I wish you to become more and more passionate missionaries, first of all to Uganda and to the rest of Africa. It is from here, the Archdiocese of Kampala, that Pope Paul VI pronounced that famous statement addressing the entire Church in Africa: “*Africans, be missionaries to yourselves*”. Certainly, the Church in Africa has already done a lot in this regard, but she can still do better. There is still much to be done about the missionary spirit, especially toward the peoples in Africa. I am saying this because I see that some priests would willingly go as missionaries to Europe or to the United States, but they wouldn’t be equally ready to go on mission to some difficult and needy places in the same country of origin, or within Africa, for instance to the northern dioceses of this country with special needs. You well know that the Ugandan Bishops Conference recently issued an appeal for priests to volunteer to work among the refugees of South Sudan, particularly in the Diocese of Arua, where there are more than a million. Who is ready to go among these poorest of the poor? Remember what the Holy Father told you in his address to you during his Visit here in Kampala two years ago: “Fidelity means telling the bishop that you are willing to go to another diocese which needs missionaries.” I don’t think that the Archdiocese of Kampala in her generosity would deny permission to any priest who would ask him to go on missionary service in some needy place or diocese.

The true missionary spirit is required also in regard to existential peripheries within your pastoral areas. There are, for example, many parishes that include slums. I would like to thank priests and religious who visit them. There are, at the same time, slums from which people complain that they do not see any. Is that possible? Remember that evangelization is done not only within the walls of a church or a school but on the streets; we have to go to where people are, bringing the gospel into the forgotten areas of life, the “*existential peripheries*” of our parishes and towns, on the highways and byways of this country, where so many people are waiting to experience the Good News and God’s mercy. The Church does not need bureaucrats, but passionate missionaries. All of this requires what Pope Francis calls “*pastoral conversion*,” which is a continuous process of putting on the mind of Christ and becoming more and more “missionary disciples.” We should go forth from our own comfort zones in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel. To announce the Gospel is a great act of charity; a gift of love for our brothers and sisters who hunger for the consoling words of Jesus and his regenerating grace.

**3. *Sensus ecclesiae*: Ecclesial communion**

Another theme I wish to put forward for your reflection today is about “ecclesial communion” – *sensus ecclesiae* – namely, a strong sense of belonging to the Church. The identity of every priest and of every consecrated person is particularly dependent on his or her communion with the Church. Yours are vocations in the Church, the People of God, vocations discerned by the Church. Your particular assignments are the expressions of God’s will for you, which are to be accepted with gratitude and obedience.

On a practical level, ecclesial communionis expressed in the attachment and fidelity to the Roman Pontiff, the centre of unity and the bond of universal communion, so also to the Bishop, the father and guide of the particular Church. There can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the Pope and with one’s own diocesan Bishop, who deserves that filial respect and fidelity promised during the rite of ordination[[1]](#footnote-1). The people of Uganda are known for their sense of hierarchy, respect and deference to those above them. It is sometimes surprising to hear some cases which are a total betrayal of this praiseworthy culture. This point is important, especially in view of the schisms that have recently rocked this and other dioceses in Uganda.

Along with defiance and lack of fidelity to one’s legitimate superiors, there is also the problem of *deep superficiality* and *spiritual worldliness* as remote causes of disunity and infighting. Spiritual worldliness leads some priests and religious (men and women) to war with anyone who stands in the way of their quest for power, prestige, pleasure and economic security[[2]](#footnote-2). Such cases are a clear sign that those involved have lost all sense of prayer, including that minimum that the Church expects daily from them, and instead invent their own Gospel based on popularity, instant gratification, money, prestige of having friends in high places, the popularity of resisting directives and decisions from their Bishops that are not in accord with their preferences.

We must also be very careful, taking note of the fact that ecclesial communion in our particular Churches is now being weakened, and sometimes even broken by *ethnic and tribal sentiments*. It is very sad to see that such mentality is growing so fast instead of diminishing, even in the minds of priests and Religious men and women, though sad to say. You well know how such ethnic and tribal conflicts have caused much suffering and even public scandal in some dioceses of Uganda and Africa, even in recent times. So, I urge you to remember dear priests and religious men and women,that your witness to living together in peace, over ethnic and tribal lines, has tremendous impact on your ministry[[3]](#footnote-3). The witness of reciprocal love and service as priests or consecrated persons – without regard for tribe or ethnicity – is earnestly desired by the people you serve. People want to see that you love and respect each other; that you work as a team. I therefore encourage you once again to continue to be at the service of unity, to promote a spirituality of communion, especially by the example of your own way of life.

**4. Ongoing formation**

As a means of personal renewal, I would like to reaffirm the importance and indispensability of *ongoing formation.* This is an issue of vital importance both for your life and for the exercise of your ministry as priests and religious. It is in fact a duty of all pastoral agents, but more so of priests as well as men and women religious. Apart from being an expression of fidelity to one’s vocation and mission, ongoing formation is also an act of love for the People of God, at whose service the priest is placed. It is important that the faithful should be able to encounter priests as well as religious men and women who are really men of God, men of prayer, suitably mature and well formed. Please, do not make the People of God become victims of superficiality and “outdatedness”. It is their spiritual right to have, at their service, well-formed and holy priests and religious!

Ongoing formation must be complete. That means it should encompass and harmonise all the dimensions of priestly and religious formation; namely human, intellectual, pastoral and spiritual dimensions. Each of these four dimensions needs recognition and attention.

You can achieve this goal through various ways: for instance, through developing the culture of reading, which must go beyond looking at newspapers and internet. As men and women of the Church, if we want to truly be in communion with the Church, we will study and cherish and pray with solid teaching, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Joy of the Gospel* or *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Africae Munus,* and many others. This is our identity and where the Holy Spirit is working today to push us out of our comfort zones and onto the streets of the world, knowing the “smell of the sheep” and showing them Christ’s love. You need to stretch your minds and widen your pastoral and missionary horizons through ongoing formation.

**5. Conclusion**

I am afraid that some sections of my speech may have sounded perhaps a little bit critical. It is out of my sincere love for you, sons and daughters, that I felt a duty to speak to you openly and genuinely. Nevertheless, I appreciate your hard work and dedicated service in our shared mission of evangelization. I ask the Lord to bless you continually with dedication, zeal and fidelity. Let us go forth, united and strengthened in our common love of our Lord. It is our turn today to build the Church. We are heirs of the Kingdom of God, whose growth has been entrusted to us. You must not resign yourself to the immensity of challenges you might encounter on the missionary adventure. Because the essential work is accomplished by Grace, that is, from God. May Our Lady and the Holy Martyrs of Uganda protect you and accompany you always in your vocation and mission.

God bless you all!

1. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation* “*Pastores dabo vobis”,* 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 98 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. *Africae Munus*, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)