

“Remain faithful to your Baptism Promises!”

136th Anniversary of the first baptisms in Uganda



This year we commemorate the 136th anniversary of the first baptisms in Uganda. It was on Easter Vigil, 27th March 1880, that the first four Ugandans were baptized by Fr. Leon Livinhac and these were: Paul Nalubandwa, Peter Ddamulira Kyoononeka, Joseph Lwanga and Leo Kaddu. Providentially, this anniversary this year falls exactly on Easter Sunday!

I invite you to focus our reflection and meditation on this year's commemoration on the recommendation of Fr. Lourdel Mapeera to the Christians who had come to see him on his deathbed at Nabunnya. Part of this recommendation was *“to remain faithful to their baptism promises”*.

During the time of Mapeera, one of the greatest fears for the missionaries was **apostasy** of the newly baptized Christians, that is, the public denial / renunciation / repudiation of one's faith. It was for this very reason that as a rule, the catechumenate period was supposed to last for four years so that the catechumens could get a solid religious formation before being accepted to baptism. During the time of Mwanga's general Christian persecution and the killing of the Uganda Martyrs, Mapeera was very much consoled and proud to write that he had heard of only one person who had denied his faith!

When Mapeera died in 1890, there was no persecution of the Christians. The persecutor, Kabaka Mwanga, had by then become a member of the Catholic flock, even though he was not yet baptized, after asking forgiveness from Mapeera and the Christians during his exile in Bukumbi, Tanganyika. In addition, God had transformed Mwanga into an instrument through which many of the Baganda embraced the Catholic faith! However, in spite of this changed atmosphere, Mapeera was never completely convinced that Mwanga would not in the future change and start persecuting the believers! In fact, Mapeera often wrote in his letters that Mwanga's character was unpredictable!

Today, nobody in Uganda is persecuted by the state because of his or her faith and therefore one would easily think that there is no risk of 'apostasy'! However, the present social, economic and political environment in which we live is full of invisible powers and forces which are a real incarnation of Satan, the one "we refused to follow and his ways (actions)" in our baptism promises! The three temptations to which Jesus was confronted immediately after his baptism: lust (greed) of the flesh, pride of life, lust of the eye (wealth, power & glory), (see Matthew 4: 1-11), are very real and it is in this context that many of us are potential candidates of apostasy! We may not have publically repudiated our faith, but our way of life could very well mean this! May we, as we hearken to the recommendation of Mapeera, "*remain faithful to your baptism promises*", fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12: 2) to learn how to "*remain faithful to our baptism promises*".

See also: http://www.africamission-mafr.org/bapteme_uganda.htm