Pilgrimages in the footsteps of Fr. Simeon Lourdel Mapeera and Bro Amans Delmas

February 2018

“Remember, Rejoice and Renew”

February is a special month in the history of the beginnings of the Catholic Church in Uganda. In it we remember the arrival of the pioneer Catholic Missionaries, Fr. Simeon Lourdel Mapeera and Bro Amans Delmas. In the same month we also remember the first encounter between these missionaries and Kabaka Muteesa I during which he gave them permission to stay in his Kingdom to preach their religion.

Commemoration of these two events by making pilgrimages in the key places that have providentially kept their memory and are in hands of the Catholic Church, is a source of annual spiritual renewal. These pilgrimages are also occasions to give thanks to the Lord for the apostles he sent to us and the abundant fruit from their work and sacrifices.

Bugoma: 11th February 2018

The chief pilgrim was the Vicar General of Masaka Diocese, Mgr Severus Jjumba. Many faithful from the islands and the mainland participated in this pilgrimage. The day coincided with the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and the International Day of the Sick. The theme chosen for the pilgrimage was: “Only the religion of Mapeera can cure us from our leprosy” (Eddiini ya Mapeera yokka yeyinza okutuwonya ekigenge kyaffe) based on the Gospel of St. Luke 17: 11-19.

Development work to beautify the site around the port where Mapeera and Amans landed in 1879 (15th February) in view of making it more prayerful for the pilgrims and attractive to the tourists is underway spearheaded by the parish of Bumangi. Let us contribute generously to this noble work.

Kigungu: 17th February 2018

The annual pilgrimage to Kigungu on the day when Mapeera and Amans landed at this port in 1879 has now become a tradition! In turn, the dioceses making Kampala Ecclesiastical Province lead the day’s liturgical celebrations. This year it was Lugazi Diocese and the main celebrant was its emeritus bishop, the Rt. Rev. Mathias Ssekamanya. The theme of the day was: “Let us irrigate the seed of faith planted by Mapeera and Amans” (Tufukirire ensigo Mapeera yokka yeyinza okutuwonya ekigenge kyaffe).
The bishops of Kampala, Masaka, Lugazi and Kiyinda-Mityana were present. The bishop of Kasana-Luwero, who had gone to celebrate the same event with the Ugandans in England, was represented by his Vicar General. Indeed it was a prayerful and joyful celebration. The big challenge is now space as each year the number of pilgrims increases.

**Kisubi: 19th February 2018**

Pilgrimage to Mapeera Tree, which is now right in the middle of the compound of the beautiful school of Kisubi Mapeera SSS, has also become an annual event on the day when Mapeera and Amans spent a night at this place. This year, the main celebrant was Fr. Emmanuel Ddamba, one the passionate promoter of the cause of the beatification of these two Servants of God. Reflecting on the fruits from the work of Mapeera and Amans and their companions, Fr. Ddamba repeatedly invited the pilgrims to chant with him the refrain: “Great things happen when God mixes with people”. The youth choir of Kisubi Parish lead in the singing. Most of the pilgrims were school children and students. We thank the Parish and School leadership for keeping alive this memory as a source of inspiration and challenge to the spiritual grandchildren of Mapeera and Amans.

**Kitebi: 21st February 2018**

This is another milestone in the journey of Mapeera and Amans commemorated every year on the date when the two missionaries arrived in the family of Amir Ssekikubo in 1879. The main celebrant was the chancellor of Kampala Archdiocese, Fr. Joseph Mary Ssebunnya. The theme of the day was: “Let us follow in the footsteps of Mapeera and Amans to spread the glory of God and to build his kingdom.” Making reference to the Muslim family that accommodated the missionaries before settling in Nabulagala, Fr. Ssebunnya invited the pilgrims to promote mutual understanding and respect among the people of different faiths. Some members from the family of Ssekikubo were present and at the end of the Eucharist, they offered a special prayer (Dua) for Mapeera, Amans and Ssekikubo.
This year, unlike the past years, we made a pilgrimage to Lubaga Cathedral in remembrance of the first encounter between Fr. Lourdel and Kabaka Muteesa I. It was on that occasion that Muteesa gave permission to the catholic missionaries to stay in his kingdom and teach their religion. The Archbishop of Kampala, Dr. Cyprian Kizito Lwanga, announced that this day will from now on be annually commemorated in the Archdiocese of Kampala. NB: This year, it was commemorated a day before because the Pope had asked all Christians to dedicate the 23rd February to prayer and fasting, praying for peace in the world and especially in South Sudan and Congo (DRC).

The chief pilgrim was the Katikkiro of Buganda, Ow’Ekit. Charles Peter Mayiga. The Papal Nuncio, His Excellency Michael August Blume, presided the Holy Mass. Before the Mass, there were some talks on the theme: “The Catholic Church and Buganda Kingdom 1879-2918: Together in the service of God’s people.” Fr. Augustine Mpagi gave the key note while Mr. Lukabwe Fred Kisirikko spoke about the importance of the language in promoting good manners, religion and culture (Obukulu bw’Olulimi mu kutumbula Obugunjufu, eddini n’obuwangwa). He pointed out the important role played by the pioneer missionaries and the Church in general in promoting the Luganda language.

The department of the Good Samaritans (Abasamaria Abalungi) of the Archdiocese of Kampala worked so hard to prepare this pilgrimage and to mobilize the pilgrims. We are very grateful to them all. Our hope and prayer is that they too, like the late Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga, will recognise in the pioneer missionaries, especially Mapeera and Amans, the Good Samaritan of the Gospel and be inspired to follow in their footsteps. (NB: Cardinal Nsubuga founded the Good Samaritans Sisters and Mapeera-Bakateyamba Home at Nalukolongo as a memorial of the charitable works of Mapeera during his stay at that place.)