

SERMON AND REFLECTION FOR THE OPENING HOLY MASS OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF SECAM AT THE CATHEDRAL OF KAMPALA ON SUNDAY, JULY 21, 2019.

1. Greetings and Introduction: My dearly beloved in Christ Jesus, today is the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time according to the Church's Calendar of Worship and we have just listened to the three Scripture readings offered by Holy Mother Church for our reflection and guidance in the coming week.

Today, your beautiful Cathedral has welcomed Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, Priests and Religious and Consecrated Men and Women, Lay women and men from the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in Africa, delegates and representatives from the Universal Church, from the Vatican and other parts of Europe, the USA and many more.

As you well know, we are here to climax the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and to celebrate our 18th Plenary Assembly here in Kampala, Uganda, where the Symposium of African Bishops was born and outdoored, and was officially inaugurated by no less a person than the Supreme Pontiff, His Holiness Pope (now St.) Paul VI on July 31, 1969.

The theme for our Golden Jubilee celebration is ***“Church-Family of God: Celebrate your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ Your Saviour!”*** We shall be here for the entire week ahead of us, praying and reflecting on the journey of faith in Christ Jesus and his mission of evangelization in the

past fifty years of the life of the Church in Africa and her adjacent islands; and we shall listen to the voice of God in the Holy Scriptures, meditate on them, review our performance in the mission entrusted to the Church by her Saviour, and in the light of the Holy Spirit take up our mission of evangelization with greater zeal and focus.

2. Beginning already today, let us reflect on the Readings and the history of SECAM a little; let me try to share a few thoughts with you, my dear People of God, or in consonance with our theme, my dear Church-Family of God, what the Lord has put on my heart for you. But before I go on with that reflection, permit me to ask: Church-Family of God in Africa, what have you to celebrate?

2.1: First and foremost, we have every reason to celebrate this Golden Jubilee, because, the Holy Bible enjoins on us to declare the fiftieth year sacred, a jubilee for all the inhabitants (see Lv. 25:10ff). Surely, from 1969 to date, the Lord our God has blessed the Church in Africa and the adjacent islands super-abundantly. It was here in Kampala, that Pope Paul VI made a very prophetic pronouncement, which, as we look back over the past fifty years, has come true indeed. In his inauguration sermon, he exhorted the Church in Africa saying: ***“You in Africa are now your own missionaries... You can, (in fact, you must) have an African Christianity!”***

Now, from barely fifty Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals who were present at the inauguration of SECAM in 1969 here in Kampala, Africa can now boast of over 500 Bishops and Archbishops and as many as 25 Cardinals, ministering to the Church on our continent and in the universal Church. From a population of about 40 million Catholics on

the continent fifty years ago, we have every reason to celebrate a population of over 178 million, making about 17% (?) of the universal Church. And it has been acknowledged that the Church in Africa is the fastest growing in the world and also the most vibrant in her liturgical celebrations and her witnessing to the faith in Christ Jesus.

My dear People of God, the Church in Africa today has a fast growing population of local and indigenous Clergy, Religious and Consecrated Persons, a good number of whom are today on mission in countries in Europe, USA, Canada, in the United Kingdom, in Asia and in Latin America, etc., some as *Fidei donum* and others as missionaries to the “*old Church*” that one time sent us missionaries.

In addition to this phenomenal and exponential growth, the Church in Africa must celebrate also because in nearly all our countries, we are contributing greatly to the integral human development of our peoples, where we run hundreds of hospitals and clinics, health-care centers and provide the formation of competent and qualified health care professionals, educational facilities like schools and training colleges, universities and professional formation programmes; where we also are involved in forming the consciences of our political and professional elite, etc. Yes, ***Church-Family of God in Africa, celebrate your Jubilee!***

Pardon me, my dear brother Bishops and my dear People of God, if have been emotional, for the Psalmist inspires me when he writes: ***“For ever I will sing of your goodness O Lord!”*** (Ps. 89:1ff). Yes, let us celebrate our Golden Jubilee, dance and sing, ***“for the Almighty has***

indeed done great things” for and through the Church in Africa in the last fifty years also. ***“Holy is his name!”***

2.2: Coming to our readings for today: From the First Reading of Genesis, we learn of the kindness and generosity of Abraham in the desert of Palestine. He welcomes three strangers and invites them to accept his offer of hospitality: ***“My Lord,” he says, “I beg you, if I find favour with you...your servant’s direction”.***

The three accept this invitation and offer of hospitality. Abraham offers them his best of food and drink. And in return, the three ask him:

“Where is your wife Sarah?...I shall visit you again next year without fail and your wife will then have a son!”

Reflecting on this event in the life of the Patriarch Abraham, the Holy Writer of the Book of Hebrews 13:2 encourages all Christian believers thus: ***“Do not neglect generosity (to strangers), for by so doing, some have entertained angels!”***

My dearly beloved People of God, the Lord is exhorting us to be kind and generous to all most especially to strangers and today to migrants and refugees and our brothers and sisters who have to flee from their homes for various reasons. Let us never forget that the Lord will always reward us for what ever kindness and generosity we offer to the least of his brothers and sisters (Mt. 25:34ff).

On this note, let me thank our brothers in the Episcopal Conference of Uganda and you my dear Church-Family of God here in this country, the

Pearl of Africa, for your warm welcome so far and your generosity in service to this Golden Jubilee Celebration. I am sure that the Lord our God who is seeing your kindness will surely reward you abundantly for this. Thanks on behalf of SECAM as the Treasurer!

2.3: From the Second Reading, I think St. Paul is calling on you and me, indeed all those baptized into Christ Jesus, and even more so those of us called to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life and the leadership of our local Churches, to readily accept suffering in our mission of evangelization on behalf of the Church which is the Body of Christ. ***“It makes me happy to suffer...God’s Message to you...”*** (Col 1:24-28). He goes on further to encourage us that it is in doing so that we witness to the glory of God to the world, for ***“...Christ in you (is) your hope of glory: this is the Christ we proclaim... to make (them) all perfect in Christ!”***

My dear People of God, may we never shy away from suffering for the sake of Christ Jesus, if we have to stand up for him and proclaim him by our service of selflessness and self-sacrifice in the face of all the evil and corruption and selfishness of the world around us today. Let us never forget that it is the Christ in us that we witness to that will bring the glory of God to the world and make all things perfect.

2.4: From the Gospel of today, this is what I have to share with you: we are told that Jesus visited two sisters, Martha and Mary. And while Martha was busy occupied with the service of hospitality, her sister

Mary, seemingly lazy, was sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to him.

No wonder Martha said to Jesus: **“Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me...Please tell he to help me!”** (Lk. 10:40-42). And what was the answer of Jesus Christ to Martha? Hmmmm, with my human mind, I find the answer of Jesus rather difficult to accept. But since he is the Lord our God, I am sure that with the light of the Holy Spirit, we should be able to make something out of it for our lives. This is my pick on it. Jesus is not favoring Mary as against the selfless service of Martha, but may be, from his answer **“Martha, Martha... from her”**; he is teaching you and me what our priority should be; namely first to listen to the Word of God and meditate it in his presence, then to go out and act on it.

Putting this in context of our mission of evangelization, to which we are going to renew our commitment as apostles sent to bring Christ and his Good News to Africa and to the world, our Lord Jesus Christ will like us to sit at his feet, listen very well to his teaching, imbibe the message and coming to know Him in person, then only does he want us to bring Christ the hope of Glory in us to the world waiting out there. We are being called to allow Christ to evangelize us and then to send us out as evangelizers.

This, I believe, is what we are here to seek also during this Jubilee celebration; the way and new method of recommitting to the evangelization mission of the Church. May the Holy Martyrs of Uganda, Patron Saints of the Church in Africa, intercede for us to be able to walk

in their footsteps and witness to Christ Jesus the hope of glory in us individually and collectively and as the Body of Christ!

May Mary the Mother of Christ, Queen of Africa and Star of Evangelization lead us on for the next fifty years. **“Church-Family of God in Africa: Celebrate your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ your Saviour!”**