

Reference

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Author: Festo Kivengere
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BISHOP FESTO - Re Ugandan Martyrs
Gen. Headquarters (Lk 9:51)

START
Isn't it lovely to be alive!!

Let us bow in a word of prayer, as we express our thanksgiving to God for His unspeakably permanent grace.

Blessed Lord Jesus, the world would not have been the same had you not walked in it. Life would never have been what it is today had you not been willing even to go all the way, even as a refugee when a baby. Lord, your ^{work?} walk has changed the world. Lord Jesus, this is why we are in this chapel. This is why we are expressing our thanksgiving in song and praise. It was a lonely forest until you came. Then we had company. Then we had a shepherd, a friend in need, a brother. Thank you, Lord, that the wounds of humanity make sense to You. Thank you, Lord, that You keep company those who are escaping alone -- the widows and the orphans. Thank you for World Vision and the vision you have given this organization just to be there when they are wanted. Bless us this morning.

I, for one, want to express my unspeakable gratitude for the prayers of your people who have surrounded Uganda during our time of need, and then thank you for receiving your servant, Janani, who stood foursquare for you in a time of rough weather. ~~Thank you, Lord Jesus this morning. Amen.~~

Well, it is very difficult for me to know how to express my gratitude to you all. But I want to say that, as Stan was speaking, my heart was really jumping for joy because of the feeling of fellowship, togetherness, expressed in letters, telegrams, prayers, in every respect. So much so that, even though our brother is now in heaven with the Lord, yet he is speaking loud and clear around the world. Thank you for keeping us company in our time of need. It was quite rough.

May I just read a verse and then share a few things. Don't expect that I am going to share all the details of the fantastic story -- there is a greater story to share. And that is not how I made my way out of Uganda, or how my brother faced his death on the 16th of February, in which we were all involved, but rather the great story of a suffering church making its stand in the world and still going on. Many people don't realize that a church doesn't succumb because of pressure. The church becomes more a church

churches do

so it wasn't a shock actually. Somehow, God had prepared us.

In 1877 missionaries reached Uganda for the first time. So this is our hundredth year since the light of the Gospel reached that country. From 1877 to 1883 - it is not a long time, just a few years - 6 or 7, not even 10. Within the first ten years of Christianity, the first martyr was murdered in Uganda, and he was a bishop - Bishop Hannington. The first bishop of Equatoria, that is East and Central Africa, who was sent by the CMS from Britain, arrived in Uganda and died before he crossed the River Nile. He was speared to death by the order of the King of Uganda at that time. And we know the story. The young king was advised by the Arabs, who happened to be there, against the coming of Christianity, it was said, "Any ^{stranger} who comes from the East and enters this country is dangerous, he is going to take over the country." So the King ordered the stranger to be murdered and a chief speared him. And as he died in a small African hut, this is what he said:

"I am now going to die, at your hands, Mr. Chief. I want you to know that my blood has bought this way."

And that way became the main entry into Uganda today. The railways and roads and everything comes that way. So it was bought, but somebody paid for it -- a very very costly thing. That was in the beginning, the first ten years of the Christian faith, - about 1883. In 1885, three boys died in Uganda. The same king ordered their arrest. The youngest was 11 and the eldest 15. We have a place where these youngsters are remembered as the first martyrs apart from the bishop. They staked their lives, they sang the martyrs' song which is very commonly sung in Uganda "O that I had wings like ~~xxx~~ angels, I would have flown and been with Jesus!" That was 1885. By 1887, hundreds had died - every village in that area that had a Christian - they were only beginners, they hadn't known much. Some could hardly read, but they had fallen in love with Jesus Christ and life had taken on a completely new meaning, and the value of living had now actually been captured. It wasn't a question of hugging my life, but it was a question of living out my life, for unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, says the Master, it remains a single grain of wheat,

1st Bishop murdered

Christianity of Uganda

3000 martyrs

without any ability to expand or produce. But when it die, it ceases being single and it become a multiplied life. Life has to die before it can multiply, said Jesus Christ.

So the martyrs died in the first ten years of the Christian church in Uganda. Isn't it an interesting thing that after a hundred years, an archbishop, a native of Uganda, seals the hundredth year with his blood again. The same circumstances, the same misunderstandings, the same false accusations, the same stand for the truth. The world hasn't changed much, has it?

That is the church, But it is a living church, you see. And let us not forget that this is part of it. If you need to recover, you need to read the Gospels, and again and again Jesus is warning his disciples that suffering and persecution and being misunderstood is part of the game. He who leaves his mother and a father and

houses for my sake shall receive each one of those a hundred times with persecution. That is part of it. Dpn't misunderstand that it just means lying on a cushion and singing lovely songs. Songs are sung better -- those three boys in Uganda, as the soldiers tied their little bodies, before those crowds of people all shouting with rage against them because they had refused to obey the king at that time -- the boys, as they were being put into the fire, as they sang, they had their arms chopped off until they came to the 11 yr. old, and he said, "Please, don't cut off my arms, I won't struggle. Just put me into the fire." And they all sang a song of praise. Others were weeping around, their parents were beseeching them s not to be so mad and silly -- why die for this thing anyway? They had not yet known the secret: My life is hid with God in Christ. I have discovered a completely new life which fire cannot control, a completely new life which is above circumstances. You can make me suffer, you can expose me to horrible humiliation, but I possess another kind of life.

Those boys sang through, and that day, do you know what happened? forty adults came to Jesus! the day the boys died. Do you know why they came? They told the missionary, When we saw the boys die singing -- a thing we had never seen. We know that when people die, they cry and mourn - it's misery. Today we saw something unique. Three boys - little, nothing to protect them - their bodies

sensitive to pain and suffering, yet they sang into the fire, and they sent a message to the king (not bitterly cursing him, but telling him, "Your majesty," isn't it wonderful? Christians are given a kind of charm called "grace." Can you imagine three little boys, having their arms chopped off, put in the fire unjustly and violently, and they send the message: Tell his majesty (they gave honor where honor was ~~de~~ wanted, even in the fire - that's Christian gently, gracious, absolutely charming, like the Master.) Tell his Majesty that he has put our bodies in the fire, we won't be long in the fire. Soon we shall be with Jesus, which ^{is} better. But ask him to repent and change his mind or he will land in a place of eternal fire and isolation." They sang and they died, and the church began.

So don't you get shocked because on the 16th we went through the fire again, and many people, leave alone the archbishop, who because of his position and stand is well known, but there are hundreds of others whose names are not known who have suffered. But he stood, of course, as a representative of the church, and he died as a Christian witness, as a martyr. Not because he was against the gov't. He never was. If anything, he did everything possible to help President Amin rule Uganda better. We are very proud of that, because that is the duty of the Christian. It is to help the permitted ruler to rule better, to help him to value the lives of the people he rules, because what is a president? He can never be a president unless he has got people. So when people die, then the presidency is actually no longer. So we were trying to help as a church, as the salt of the world, to speak against corruption, violence, mistreatment, loss of life, arbitrary arrests -- all these things, we spoke and wrote and submitted to Pres. Amin to help him to recover the value of Ugandans. And of course this is what makes Christianity precious, that Jesus was born a human being, lifts every little man, puts him in a conspicuously important position - you can't play with him, for the Son of God became Man for men. Then the same Son of God, concerned about the recovery, paid His own precious life blood, so that this man in whose humanity he came may be ^{recovered} restored and made complete in God -- very precious!

#12
On the 30th of January, I preached before 30,000 people at the consecration of one of our bishops, and this was my text, taken from Acts where St. Paul said, "You minisēers, take chārgē of yourselves, and the church over which God has made you bishops or shepherds or presbytyrs, for this church God purchased with His own blood. C'N YOU IMAGINE THAT? That God should purchase a community by paying His own life blood; that makes every member of that community precious beyond any explanation. I preached on that and I challenged the government authorities that were there. Some intelligence men were there, some policemen were there, governors were there; we had Moslem Sheikhs in the congregation who came. (That's why I keep telling people - Don't listen to the talk that Moslems in Uganda are enemies of Christians - not at all. They too are caught in the confusion.

#13
So I spoke to this congregation from the bottom of b my heart, challenging both the church ministers and the gov't authorities that authority is given by God to serve those who are under that authority. So I challenged the soldiers about the misuse of authority, and governors and everyone. In fact, I was supposed to have been arrested after that, but that was not yet my business, the time had not yet come. You know the Lord times our movements, and this was not the timing yet. What I did was out of a love, and they all knew that it was said not maliciously but from the bottom of my heart to help them to know th value of their authority, because authority is given by God to those who have it in order to serve, not to exploit, not to act like tyrants, but like servants. This is the burden.

#14
young artists martyred
So, brethren, the church is still there in Uganda, and there is suffering, but it is a gloriously moving church. This was a great year. Do you realise that a very interesting thing has ~~axxx~~ happened. We have had a number of artists, kyong Ugandans, gifted in acting. They had been given ~~by~~ ~~one~~ part ~~by~~ of our church the responsibility of acting a play of the early martyrs of Uganda as a part of the Centenary Celebrations. A week after the archbishop had been murdered, these young people ~~are~~ all were murdered. They were going to act a part of the early martyrs of the church. But in

the acting, they themselves became martyrs. They all died, and their bodies were found a few miles from the city. We lost tremendous gifts in them, but they died in the faith.

But you see, all of you are actors - don't forget. A Christian is an actor, a participant, not a spectator! Many times we make a mistake, we think we are spectators. ^{N/D} We are participants - right there in the play, and at one stage or another, your turn may come to act your part. Don't make a mistake about that -- I don't want to scare you -- but it is beautiful, it is not you acting the play. You are given that special ability, such as was given to his grace, the archbishop, to stand with the rest of us on the 16th and before, making presentations to the government, knowing ~~that~~ full well that it may cost someone his life. That we knew, there was no mistake about it. Nor were we deceived that we had any other protection ---- you people who enjoy the kind of protection in different countries -- there are times when you know no other protection except God. And that's very good, isn't it? That one never fails. Other protections do fail.

And so, we praise God. When the time comes, God gives that extraordinary grace to the weak, to the trembling heart. And we were in the trembling.

I want to read these beautiful words taken from St. Luke's gospel about the time when the Lord neared the end. Chapter 9:51: "Now when the time was almost come for Jesus to be received up into heaven, he steadfastly and determinedly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers before Him."

Particularly that word: steadfastly and determinedly set his face, to go to Jerus'm. In another part of the Gospel, it says, "The disciples followed Him in fear." Realizing the seriousness of the matter, a set face like a flint, the divine determination, the anxiety to be baptized into the redeeming death -- it made the hearts of the disciples absolutely trembling in fear. They did not know what to expect every step spelled danger. Do you know that between the week of the 5th of Feb. and the 16th - 11 days, but particularly betw. the 8 and 16th, we were just exactly like these disciples. We were following the Master and every step, every hour smelled of danger. until on Friday. the 11th. His grace.

Janani, came to us, we were in a council of bishops discussing the matters of his having been attacked at midnight on the 5th, searched at gunpoint. We were passing resolutions which we wanted to present to the president of the country. And on the 11th he came with his N.T. as we were sitting praying, and gave us a little thought of devotion. He took the story of when the disciples were crossing alone the stormy Sea of Galilee. And the Master was praying in the hills after dismissing the crowd - in Math 14 and elsewhere. And he read from the Revised Standard Version these words,

419 "And after midnight, Jesus was alone on the mountain and He saw the disciples making headway painfully." Then he turned to us and said, The Lord has seen us in the last four days making headway painfully. Then he concluded by saying, "But I see the road very clearly." Storms, waves, wind, danger, but I see the road very clearly!

420 We were like the disciples, the steadfastness of the disciples, the determination to go full the whole way, and why? for the joy that was set before Him. What was that joy? You and I. To pick up the pieces of broken humanity was the great joy, it infused his determination with power. It set the divine heart aflame, and no one would divert the attention. No one! Praise God? I wouldn't be here today.

421 And then, you know, the Holy Spirit does the same. That week -- don't misunderstand me -- we were absolute cowards! Absolutely. At times like this, you are likely to make mistakes. We were not champions and warriors, not at all. We were all trembling in our knees. But there was something unique -- the value of the men and women of Uganda -- the preciousness the Gospel has given them -- the eternal value of the soul. These wonderful revelations infused the little hearts of trembling bishops to go ahead. We were planning to put on a special protest, dressed in our Anglican cassocks with our bishops staffs - you know the crooks we use - And we were determined to march through the city in protest to the President's office, realizing that by doing that, we would be exposing ourselves to the breaking the law of the country ~~with~~ which says No marches without permission. And we had no permission, but we were going to

to do it anyway, trust^{ign} that if were arrested, O.K. If it is the end, let it be the end. The end comes in many ways, doesn't it? Many more people die of heart attack -- very few die of martyrdom. But every day hundreds and millions of people are dy^{ing}. So don't fear that. Don't think Festo now is out of danger of death, no, no. I can collapse as I talk to you now! There is no problem there. But what happens is that, before God sets your time, you don't like to hasten it, do you? It means, that if I were dead, I would not be speaking to you. I would be speaking in another way, but not in this way. For example, my archbishop is speaking now to the world everywhere. In every corner of the earth, he is speakin 20 ft high in stature spiritually, because of the stand he made.

So we were encouraged and infused by the revelation of the love of God. The love of God constrains me. This is why we made presentations, this is why on the 16th we stood, this is why his grace spoke with the president of Uganda on the 14th -- they had quite a long session - a clear, truthful, Christian presentation.

Growing church #22
#23
A suffering church is a growing church. And we needed to recove that, so although it is painful, although it is tragic humanly speaking, spiritually it is glorious. The blood of the martyss is the seed of the church. And the church of Uganda is still function- ing, by the way. Some people thought at that when the archbishop died, and his ~~re~~ body was refused us for a glorious funeral which we had planned for the 20th, the reporters thought the churches were closed and there were no services in Uganda. Not at all. On the 20th, the had a glorious service at the cathedral where he would have been buri in Kampala city. 4,500 people packed the cathedral out for a thanks- giving service. After the main service, they went outside and stood around the open grave and sang praises to God. And the former archbishop gave a lovely word. After that service, if you me^{nt} every Christian in the country, they were determined to die, determined double, a kind af feeling: I will miss it if I don't die now. The crown of glory is a tremendous thing! And now people are being born again. People who took Christianity lightly are taking it seriously. People who were on the fringe are ⁱⁿ in. Backsliders are being reclaimed quickly. There is no time to waste. Maybe you'll be the next. It's tremendous, you see. But we fear these things.

Do you want to hear how I got out? I don't like to play down what I am sharing. You know, the obvious can sometimes kill the fundamental. All I want to say is that I got out in the usual refugee way. (laughter) In other words, we made our way out of our beloved country, reluctantly, but aware of the danger. With the consensus and love of our Christian friends, who gave us a chance to go. When my wife and I left the city, driving 260 miles, we had been in the city during all these events you have been reading about, and we had in our flat we received more than 25 telephone calls each day, 3 days after the death of the archbishop, many of these calls were people crying on the telephone because it was known that I was dead! It was reported that I was next on the list. So you see it was quite difficult, and in the end, my wife and I decided quietly that it was better for me to go to my local town, to my diocese, among my people and to be arrested there. At least I wanted to give them a chance to know I was arrested among them.

So we took our car and drove 260 miles, not expecting to get to the end. That's a funny feeling, isn't it, to drive not knowing whether you will ever get home. And yet, we had a lovely time of fellowship, my wife and I in the car. I was driving, and she was whispering lovely words of Jesus. We knew Jesus was in the car, so all was well.

So we got back home -- not a thing on the road! He had swept everything out. So we got home. As we got into our little town, sheltered in the mountains of western Uganda, immediately we were told by those who loved us: xx The town is full of intelligence people seeking for the bishop. We were told they had checked on my house four times that day. So we looked at each other, We didn't unpack our suitcases. We sat there. The brethren came and we prayed with them, and some of them were in tears. They never expected to see us, so it was just like seeing a man who was resurrected. Actually some of us have a little taste of the resurrection. And then immediately we were warned that that night could easily be the night. So we had to make a very ~~uncomfortable~~ uncomfortable decision. I had planned to preach in my cathedral on Sunday morning. I was looking forward to that, I was just going to pour my heart out. Then we prayed and then it became clear that we had better go.

Some people put their lives on the line and helped us to get

of our beloved country, driving ~~th~~ through the mountains. And we got near the place of escape about 3:30 in the morning. So you were praying Sunday morning, from Saturday when you heard the news, and my wife and I were making our way through the mountains to the point of escape. You see, prayer was absolutely timed. I don't know how the L?A Times got it right!! (laughter) Just right. It was correct reporting.

#27 I remember how we got ^{to} in a place at 3:30^{am} with our suitcases. Those who helped us had to rush back. Then we had to face climbing on foot throo the mountains in the night to another country. We were guided by a young Christian man, bless him. One of these determined Christians. He woke up at midnight, wakened by another Christian lady. He came and picked up our bags. When my wife said, what about the rest of our suitcases, he said, Forget it. Life is more precious! th

#28 So he guided us through a very steep sort of mountain & footpath. My wife had fever, tonsilitis, coughing. However, she was sustained. Christians have that extra -- when you are about to collapse, somehow the oil of grace pours in, ~~and~~ she kept stopping. We would pray and then go on.

#29 Six thirty in the morning we got to the top! The young man said to us, All right, now you can step into these fields. Three steps and you will be in a differant country. We did, and he said, All right. Now you can breathe. Sit down!

#30 So we sat down on two stones on the top, ^{looking out at} of the most beautiful scenery you have ever seen. It was dawning in the east, and we were 9,000 feet above sea level. I looked at Mera and she looked at me, and I felt we were really like Jacob. You remember the old patriarch putting his head on a stone. We were sitting on it! And then that is how we got out!

#31 Later we were helped. Hands of love helped us. A young businessman in that country where we were led.

#32 First I must tell you that the lady in whose house we had landed seeing we had gone with just a few things, put her baby on her back at 3:40 in the mornnngn! and a suitcase on her head and walked behind us quietly. We did not know. Very, very touching, isn't it? This is what is called Christian love. Then two other Christians woke up - men. They came to the house, got the rest of the things, caught

And they followed us. We knew nothing about that. They even followed us to such an extent, and got to the mountain because they walked quicker, they heard an engine, and they knew that that was the only vehicle in the village that could have taken us another 75 miles on. Now it had gone on its business. This was from the house where the young man was taking us. So one of the men left the other with the suitcases and rushed on foot and managed to stop the vehicle on the other side of the mountain. He asked the young businessman to go home because "you have got special guests back home." The young R.C. man turned quickly, went back, stopped his merchandise selling plans, put us in his truck and drove us 75 miles without asking us for a cent. When we said, What about gas, he said, "Gas is cheap, your lives are precious!"

That's how God is teaching people how to love! That's how we got out. You know your prayers were like oil! We really sensed it. We felt we were surrounded somehow somewhere with the love of God's people. And so we are now out of Uganda, which we love. And we are learning to love the Man you are hearing about, the man called President Amin.

You see, we believe he is a human being for whom Christ died. In spite of what he has done, in spite of what people say, we as a Christian community feel we owe a debt of love to that man. For Jesus said, Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you, because in so doing, you heal the wounds.

Will you pray for the Church of Uganda, that it may not lose its composure under pressure. That it may never lose its Christian essence in suffering. That Christians may really stand firmly on the eternal Rock and love and love and love to death. If that takes place, there is no possibility of the church being eliminated. You can't! I call that God's time-bomb. You set it in motion, let the Holy Spirit time it. I am looking forward to going back to my country one of these days. I don't know when. Maybe Pres. Amin will be converted. Or perhaps he will lose his seat, if he refuses to be converted. But I am looking forward to going back to Uganda and see the glory of a deepened revival, a renewal that is going to have a deeper essence than anything it has experienced. Because the blood of Janani Luvum and many others can never leave a church superficial.