

# To love, serve, and die.

Thomas J. Serafin, V.V.,CSMA, KODA

In the gospel reading, Matthew 10: 26 – 33; Jesus said to the twelve: “Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the house drops”. And he added, “Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.”

I first met His Majesty King Kigeli V of Rwanda at an event in Washington, DC where I spoke on the Martyrs of Vietnam on behalf His Imperial Highness, Prince Nguyen Phuc Buu Chanh. At seven-foot-two-inches tall, the King is an imposing figure.



It was only after I met his majesty that I did research on the horrible carnage in Rwanda. King Kigeli was driven out of leadership by the then MDR Parmehutu party under the leadership of Rwanda's first President, Gregoire Kayibanda, who also abolished the monarchy.

After reading about the brutal massacres in his home country I felt sad that I was not more aware of the problems in his country. If I knew more and was

better prepared I could have at least apologized for certain circumstances and members of the Christian community who unfortunately participated. I made a vow to myself that the next time I go to such an event that I will research the backgrounds of all the guests and study the current events of all involved. I write this article as a post apology for the horrible atrocities that have been committed upon the faithful subjects of the King, and the brutal killings of the faithful that continue today.

To die for Christ is one thing. To die because of Christ is another. One requires the willful offering of an individuals life for Christ, the other is the taking of a person's life because of a hatred for Christ.

The victims of the “killing fields of Rwanda” are too great to do justice in a small article such as this. I will just highlight a few of the Catholic clergy. These are some of the martyrs we speak of, the Martyrs of Rwanda.

In 1997, Hutu gunmen murdered Sister Griet Bosmans, a 62-year-old Belgian nun who was the headmaster of the Catholic school and 17 of the girl's students. In the same year gunmen fired automatic weapons and threw grenades at schoolchildren, killing 5 children and an adult.

In the same year in Kampagna, Rwanda, a 61 year old member of the Missionaries of Africa order, Father Guy Pinard, was barbarously murdered as he brought the Blessed Sacrament to sick members of his parish on Sunday.

The year 1998 was a particularly brutal year for the religious serving Our Lord in Rwanda. Fr. Boniface Kabago (Ruhengeri) a Diocesan priest and Sr. Valens Mukanoheli of the Benebikira were murdered.

In Kigali, Father Vijeko Curic, a Croatian-born Franciscan priest serving the missions in Rwanda, was murdered near Holy Family parish church. He was killed by a pistol shot, fired at close range, while he was in his car. Sr. Devota Rwangeyo of the Daughters of Resurrection and Sr. Valens Mukanoheli of the Benebikira were murdered. Fr. Boniface Kabago, a Diocesan priest, was murdered.

A horrible barbarous act took place in Kigali; five Catholic sisters of the Daughters of Resurrection were murdered in their convent in Rwanda's northwest province by Hutu rebels. The rebels encircled the church of the nuns before breaking into their homes where they massacred Sr. Epiphane Gasigwa, Sr. Felicite Benimana, Sr. Betilde Mukamuhire, Sr. Cesarine Wimana, and Sr. Xavera Mukagakwaya, with guns, machetes and axes.

In the new millennium the violence continued; in the Diocese of Kabgayi, Rwanda, at the Parish of Mugina, Fr. Isidro Uzcudum, 69, a Spanish priest of Fidei donum (S. Sebastian), was instantly killed in the rectory when he was robbed by three men and then shot in the head by one of the men who wanted more than he received.

In 2001, Mr. Giuliano Berizzi, an Italian lay missionary was murdered in his home in Kigali (Rwanda), perhaps mistaken for a missionary priest.

Pope John Paul II, who condemned the killings, wrote that the Catholic Church in Rwanda could not be blamed for acts by individual members. "The church in itself cannot be held responsible for the misdeeds of its members who have acted against evangelical law," the Pope wrote in a letter addressed to Rwandans. "All the members of the church who have sinned during the genocide must have the courage to bear the consequences of the deeds that they have committed against God and against their future."

On May 21, 2005 Pope Benedict XVI called on Rwandan Catholics to remain hopeful for the future and steadfast in their faith, although they were "harshly tried" by the nation's 1994 genocide. He also asked that the Holy Spirit, during this time of Pentecost, help "make fruitful the efforts of those who are working to build fraternity among all Rwandans in a spirit of truth and justice."

As Christ instructed His twelve, the Martyrs of Rwanda teach us, Fear no one. That nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What Our Lord told them in the darkness, they speak to us in the light; what they heard whispered, they proclaim on the house drops".

Remember the most important message from the Gospel, "Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."