

Our Lady of Kibeho: 'An Urgent Appeal to the Repentance and Conversion of Hearts'

The Church Marks the 40th Anniversary of the Our Lady of Kibeho Apparitions



Clockwise from Left: Statue of Our Lady of Kibeho at place of apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, Kibeho, Rwanda, Immaculée Ilibagiza, and Cardinal Antoine Kambanda, archbishop of Kigali, Rwanda. (photo: Shutterstock/Courtesy photos)

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Nov. 28 marks a major milestone and an important reminder for the world as the apparitions of our Blessed Mother at Kibeho celebrate their 40th anniversary.

On Nov. 28, 1981, Our Lady appeared in Kibeho, Rwanda, with messages not only for that small African country but for the whole world. Thus, the official feast of Our Lady of Kibeho is celebrated by the Church on Nov. 28.

The Mother of God appeared first to 17-year-old Alphonsine Mumureke, who was alone in the dining room of Kibeho High School, a Catholic boarding school founded by a parish priest and run by the Benebikira Sisters. The teen had arrived at the school that October. Our Lady identified herself: “I am the Mother of the Word” (*Nyina wa Jambo*). She later explained it was synonymous to *Umubyeyi W’iamna*, “Mother of God.”

Mumureke answered that she loves “God and his Mother, who has given us their Son, who has saved us.” Our Lady confirmed, “It is true. I have come to assure you of this.”

She told Mumureke, “I have heard your prayers. I would like it if your companions had more faith because some of them do not believe enough.”

The young girl would later describe Our Lady: “She had a seamless white dress and also a white veil on her head. Her hands were clasped together on her breast, and her fingers pointed to the sky. ... I could not determine the color of her skin, but she was of incomparable beauty.”

As has happened in other approved apparitions, the school community did not believe Mumureke at first. Still, she pressed her schoolmates to ask the Blessed Mother to enlighten them and to appear to some of them, too. Two months later, in January 1982, Our Lady also appeared to another student, 20-year-old Nathalie Mukamazimpaka. Then, in March, Mary began appearing to a third student, 21-year-old Marie Claire Mukangango. This was quite significant because, as Bishop Augustine Misago of the Diocese of Gikongoro, later noted in his declaration of the authenticity of the apparitions, Marie Claire at first “had been well known for her strong opposition to the apparitions. This new development was immediately interpreted by some as a positive sign coming from heaven to all the double-minded who were reluctant to take the apparitions Alphonsine spoke about seriously.”

Formal investigations into the apparitions by theological and medical commissions began in April 1982. The reports of three other girls who claimed to receive the apparitions and one boy who maintained he had visions of Jesus were dismissed during the formal diocesan investigations, with only Mumureke, Mukamazimpaka and Mukangango being declared authentic visionaries. Visions continued and then eventually stopped for Mukamazimpaka on

Dec. 3, 1983; for Mukangango, her visions ended earlier, on Sept. 15, 1982, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, which was to have great significance connected to the apparitions. Mumureke's visions lasted eight years to the day, finishing on Nov. 28, 1989.

“The first two years of the apparitions at Kibeho (1982 and 1983) constitute a decisive period for whoever wishes to know what happened and form an opinion,” declared Bishop Misago. “In fact, it was during these two years that significant events were produced. These made Kibeho known and caused crowds to flock there. It was always in that period that the fundamental elements of the message of Kibeho were communicated and recapitulated and the apparitions of the major part of the first visionaries ended.”

By May 1982, the news of the apparitions and the messages were spreading rapidly throughout the country. Crowds came to the site. By Aug. 15, 1988, Bishop J.B. Gahamanyi, at the time the local bishop of the diocese in which the apparitions occurred, before the diocese was divided and the site became part of the new Diocese of Gikongoro, approved public devotion. In 1992, building of the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows got underway. Yet when Our Lady's requests were not fully followed, a warning she had given materialized, and Rwanda suffered during a genocide starting in 1994.

On June 29, 2001, Bishop Misago released the final judgment, which was also approved by the Holy See, that Our Lady did appear at Kibeho to three young visionaries. Kibeho was then added to the Vatican's list of approved Marian apparition sites, joining others such as Fatima.

The Messages

The appearances and messages of the Blessed Mother proved not only greatly relevant then, but are also undeniably crucial for us and our time — and for all times.

In 1982 Our Lady said her messages were not just for Rwanda or Africa. She was concerned for the whole world.

“Repent, repent, repent! Convert while there is still time,” Our Lady conveyed to Mukangango. Reporting this, Bishop Misago called Our Lady's message “an urgent appeal to the repentance and conversion of hearts.” He also noted the moral state of the world was of concern, stating how our Blessed Mother said, “The world conducts itself very badly.”

“The world hastens to its ruin; it will fall into the abyss”; in other words, “it is plunged into innumerable and unrelenting disasters.”

She emphasized: “The world is rebellious against God; it commits too many sins; it has neither love nor peace.” Our Lady added, “If you do not repent and do not convert your hearts, you will fall into the abyss.” She underscored, “I am concerned with and turning to the whole world. The world is evil and rushes towards its ruin. It is about to fall in its abyss. The world is in rebellion against God. Many sins are being committed. There is no love and no peace. If you do not repent and convert your hearts, you will all fall into an abyss.”

Bishop Misago also noted that Our Lady repeatedly told Mumureke to repeat to the people: “Faith and unbelief will come unseen.” The bishop also recorded, “‘Pray always for the Church, when many troubles are upon it in the times to come.’ Thus Mary said to Alphonsine on Aug. 15, 1983, and on Nov. 28, 1983.” He also recorded how, on Aug. 15, 1982, the visionaries saw Our Lady crying: The “Mother of God was very saddened because of people’s unbelief and lack of repentance. She complained of our bad way of life, which is characterized by the slackness of customs, the likeness of evil, and continuous disobedience to God’s Commandments.” The girls saw a river of blood, people being killed, unburied bodies and other gruesome images. Bishop Misago added that it “proved to be prophetic” because of the genocide that took place, beginning in 1994. It was reminiscent of what Our Lady said at Fatima of a greater war happening if people would not change.

Being our loving Mother, Our Lady constantly gave the Kibeho visionaries the antidote, the perfect cure with simple motherly directives to change dire events. People just had to heed her maternal wisdom.

“From the beginning, she said many times: ‘Repent; repent. Convert why there is still time.’ It is very important, this repentance,” said Father Leszek Czelusniak, a Marian Father of the Immaculate Conception during a recent interview) televised by the Marians at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and director of the Marian Evangelization Center of Kibeho. “Conversion of the heart to God is our daily work.” When Jesus started his ministry, “he called [believers] to convert and believe in the Gospel, the Good News.”

“Pray the Rosary every day,” international speaker Immaculée Ilibagiza, who miraculously lived through the Rwandan genocide, told the Register, adding, “I pray more Rosaries when I am in trouble.”

Ilibagiza explained that Our Lady said, “Pray the Rosary as my children. Pray together. Make prayer groups to give each other strength. Every day pray the Rosary. Pray the Seven Sorrows Rosary at least on Tuesdays and Fridays.”

The prayerful survivor sees connections with Fatima. “In Rwanda she appeared with the rosary and gave us the Seven Sorrows Rosary. She told them to say the Rosary every day. She reminded them she is Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, and ‘I cannot help you if you do not pray.’”

In Kibeho, there were also signs in the sun, and Ilibagiza said Mary told the children how “she loved St. Joseph so much,” and while in Rwanda they had many songs for her, they didn’t have many for her husband. “We have many songs now,” Ilibagiza enthused.

Our Lady told Jacinta and Lucia the Fatima seers to make sacrifices and offer them to her Son, Ilibagiza added. “Make sacrifices. Also mortify yourself — that’s how she put it. Nathalie was to suffer [though mortifications such as extraordinary fasting during Lent in 1983] and teach the people the importance of suffering.”

Mary said, “No one will reach heaven without suffering,” or “A child of Mary does not reject suffering.” Wrote Bishop Misago, “This subject is among the most important among the revelations in Kibeho, particularly for Nathalie. Suffering, which is unavoidable in this life, is necessary for Christians to attain eternal glory.” He explained that it is “both a means of compensating for the sins of the world and participating in Jesus’ and Mary’s sufferings for the salvation of the world.” The visionaries were invited to accept “suffering through faith in love, mortifying themselves and denying themselves pleasures for the conversion of the world. Thus, Kibeho is a reminder of the role of the cross in the life of a Christian and the Church.”

“She said no one in this life leaves without suffering,” Ilibagiza explained. “She invited us to mortify our bodies” and asked “all to make a sacrifice. ... Every day give a little sacrifice. Give to someone else who is hungry; give to the poor.” Then see the fruits “if you accept it and offer to God,” Ilibagiza continued. “Look at this world today” and help it say, “Okay God, I offer this to you, but please help us.”

Our Lady of Kibeho also said, “Pray always and single-heartedly.” The bishop saw that people were either not praying or praying as they should, with zeal and purity of heart. Ilibagiza underlined the message focused on “a terrible thing was going to happen to us if we did not come back to God, to God’s commandments. In Rwanda, 98% are Christian.” They were practicing but “not sincerely.”

Ilibagiza saw many dying in Rwanda, and to this day, she tries to help survivors as wounds continue to need healing. “I wish I can tell the whole world: ‘Please! Take you faith seriously. We have the power to defeat any evil, and that is the power of the Rosary.’ We were like, really, no it can’t be that bad. Really? People don’t know when prophecies will come true.”

For Cardinal Antoine Kambanda, archbishop of Kigali, Rwanda, “The genocide was one of the most important proofs for me of the authenticity of the apparitions of Kibeho,” as he said in *Kibeho: Listen, My Children*, a new docudrama to air on EWTN Nov. 24.

Among all the proofs Bishop Misago included “the phenomenon of the ‘mystical journey’” for Mumureke and Mukamazimpaka through heaven, purgatory and hell, the messages remaining “relevant, and orthodox,” and the “spiritual fruit.” Although there was an unfortunate time of backsliding when before the genocide people were not praying as they should and fully heeding the requests, the fruits did begin to blossom, with “an undeniable spiritual renewal,” from an increase of vocations to priesthood and religious life to people being reconciled with God and neighbor and greater attendance at Sunday and weekday Masses, more receiving the sacrament of penance, and renewed Marian devotion, with people praying the Rosary regularly, and many testifying to their “conversion because of Kibeho.”

The message is for all. Bishop Edouard Sinayobe, a visionary eyewitness and author of *Mother of the Word*, said in the docudrama, “Even if she appears in a certain culture or in a specific place, like at Lourdes in France ... her message is always universal — that I came for the whole world.”

In 2014, Pope Francis reminded the Rwanda bishops on their *ad limina* visit, “The Mother of Jesus wished to appear in your country to several children, reminding them of the efficacy of fasting and of prayer, especially the recitation of the Rosary.”

Seven Sorrows Rosary

Mukangango received revelations about the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary. “The Blessed Virgin loves this Rosary,” noted Bishop Misago in his declaration.), that Mary asked that “the Rosary to the Seven Sorrows of the Mother of God become a part of the practices promoted in the sanctuary in Kibeho and elsewhere. ...”

“However,” he added, “this prayer does not replace the Holy Rosary.”

Ilibagiza prays the Seven Sorrows Rosary daily. “Our Lady told us: Accept suffering. The Seven Sorrows Rosary will help us not to be scared of suffering,” she explained. “My Lord has given me an example. And then praying the Seven Sorrows of Mary for her Son, you become one with her. And you love him more. You love him with his Mother. That is where our blessing comes from — loving God above all. It’s spiritual therapy. You will always come out feeling so much better [saying] I have no more pain focusing on Jesus and Our Lady. The Seven Sorrows Rosary is the best way to face suffering in a safe way. Every single sorrow is about Jesus, and Jesus is our life. We are crying about him, and so we are receiving the graces.”

In that same interview, Father Leszek said, “[W]e sometimes forget that the Blessed Mother had a lot of trials, too, and many sufferings, and yet she turned everything over to God, and that’s what enabled her and allowed her to get through everything,” he said. “The Seven Sorrows never finish with the cross. It is the way for the Resurrection.”

Bishop Milago, who promotes the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows in Kibeho, concluded in his declaration, “What the Mother of God expects from us immediately is that we zealously accept the address directed to us by the intercession of her visionaries. This address is an urgent call to repentance and conversion, to a changed way of thinking, to a denial of everything that distances us from Christ. The address obligates us to a rediscovery of the Gospel of brotherly love and to giving proof of greater zeal in prayer and obedience to God’s commandments.”

Our Lady came to Kibeho 40 years ago to help us because, as Ilibagiza emphasized, the Blessed Mother assured, “Don’t forget I love you.”

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<http://www.kibeho-sanctuary.com>

Kibeho: Listen, My Children is a moving docudrama of the major events around the apparitions at Kibeho. Beautifully presented and portrayed, this new film produced by EWTN offers a fuller picture of the Marian message. It premieres on EWTN on Nov. 24 and Nov. 28, the anniversary of Kibeho.

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