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Uganda cardinal to religious: 'rise up to Africa's suffering'

Thomas C. Fox | Feb. 5, 2012

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Cardinal Wamala waits for offerings during mass (Photo by Tom Fox)

KAMPALA, UGANDA -- The retired Archbishop of Kampala, Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala, Feb. 5, addressing an African religious delegation at a high mass in the in the Sacred Heart cathedral here, encouraged them to carry on with their work with the marginalized of the continent.

Fifty-seven delegates representing 21 national conferences of religious are in Uganda having come for the second general assembly of the Confederation of Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar, or COMSAM.

There are more than 40 nations with Catholic religious conferences on the African continent. However, some were unable to come here to attend the conference.

?Many, if not most? of your religious congregations ?were born in that spirit of Christ: concern for the poor, for the weak, for the marginalized, for the oppressed,? the elderly cardinal, 85, said.

?They were born to fight evil in whatever color or form it manifests itself. It was a concern for justice, for love, for peace, for a reconciled humanity.?

Echoing works from Pope Benedict XI, the cardinal called upon these religious leaders to carry on in the spirit of their founders and foundresses.

Recognizing some of the deep suffering that continues on in Africa today, Wamala asked: ?Why should there be suffering in the world today? Why should innocent people suffer??...?It is puzzling all of us even today.?

Jesus was not blind to the reality of suffering, but he would exhort his followers ?to rise up to the reality. He exhorted them to engage in bringing about a new world, a task which Jesus himself started.

?It is no use blaming God for the reality of suffering,? the cardinal concluded. ?Rise up to it.?

Addressing another perennial issue facing many Africans, the issue of violence and conflict, the prelate, speaking in a quiet but firm voice, said the task before African at the beginning of this new millennium is the task of reconciliation.

Again, quoting Pope Benedict, Wamala said: ?Africa is called, in the name of Jesus, to live reconciliation between individuals and communities and to promote peace and justice in truth for all.?

Doubtless when you gather this week to devise ways and means of dealing with common concerns, your

attention, ?first and foremost must be directed to what is happing in the your families, in our zones, in your institutes.?

He then added that there is a ?bigger family? that the religious of Africa must be concerned about. It is the family of Africa. ?Africa with its people at times [are] living in inhumane conditions, conditions often created by their fellow men!?

?The Holy Father invites you to collaborate with leaders at all levels in the church in order to create a society worthy of man whose dignity was restored by Christ through his life, passion, death and resurrection.?

The cathedral on the outskirts of Kampala was packed. Some younger children sat in the aisles backs against the pews and walls. A choir led hymns in a lively service that lasted more than 90 minutes.

The mass was celebrated in English in a rite banned in the west beginning last Advent.

The mass was concelebrated by the Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Cardinal-elect Archbishop Jiao Bráz de Aviz, who was in Kampala for the outset of the religious leadership gathering.

A profession into the cathedral of mostly religious with some laity set a solemn and joyful scene for the Eucharist. At the consecration of each of the species, bread and wine, worshippers burst into applause.

A half hour of speeches followed the mass as two dozen couples holding infant children waited patiently to have their new sons and daughters baptized into the faith.

[Tom Fox is *NCR*'s publisher.]

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