The Shrine of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows of Kibeho

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Kibeho is a small town in South Rwanda, in the current administrative district of Nyaruguru, 162 km from the country's capital city, Kigali. Kibeho is also the name given to one of the parishes in the diocese of Gikongoro, founded in 1934 and dedicated to Mary, Mother of God. Today, Kibeho is best known as a place of pilgrimages and Marian apparitions, which have been recognized by the Church.

The apparitions of Kibeho began on November 28th, 1981, and came to an end on November 28th, 1989. Our Lady first appeared to Alphonsine Mumureke, a 16-year-old girl, while she was still in high school. Teachers and students found it difficult to believe her and many mocked her. However, some time later other young students also claimed to have had visions: Natalie Mukamazimpaka, a 17-year-old girl who saw the Our Lady for almost two years, beginning in January 1982; and 21-year-old Marie-Claire Mukamgango, to whom the Mary appeared from March to September 1982, giving her the mission of spreading the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary throughout the Church. Four other people claim to have witnessed the apparitions; however, they have not been officially recognized by the Church.

In 1983, the apparitions were interrupted, and only Alphonsine continued to see the Our Lady each year on the 28th of November, until the year 1989. To all these visionaries, Mary presented herself as the "Mother of the Word" (In the local language: "Nyina Wa Jambo").

The message that Mary delivered in Kibeho is an urgent appeal to the world, a call for repentance and the conversion of hearts, for sincere prayer, a call to love and to live the faith intensely. But it is above all a call for reconciliation: Mary requests that sin be renounced; she deplores all forms of idolatry, lack of respect, materialism, hypocrisy and sexual immorality.

Mary calls on the world to change while there is still time, advising it against the serious consequences of its current moral state. On October 15th, 1982, the visions were frightful: flowing blood, people killing each other, abandoned dead bodies with no one to attend to the burial. These visions proved to be prophetic in view of the human dramas that took place in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region between 1994 and 1995 during the civil and ethnic wars between the Hutus and Tutsis. Within only a few months, the genocide claimed 800,000 lives in Rwanda, among whom were 3 bishops and more than 400 priests and religious. Marie-Claire, one the visionaries, was also killed during the massacre.

On August 15th, 1988, Bishop Jean Baptiste Gahamanyi of the Diocese of Butare allowed

public worship at the Marian Shrine of Kibeho, and named it “Our Lady of Sorrows”. On June 21st, 2001, the Holy See gave its approval.

Prayer to Our Lady of Sorrows

Holy Mary, Mother of Sorrows,
teach us to understand the value of the Cross in our lives,
so that we may complete in our bodies
that which is lacking in the Passion of Christ,
in benefit of His Mystical Body, which is the Church.
And when our pilgrimage on this earth ends,
allow us to live eternally with you in the Kingdom of Heaven.
Amen.