

JUNE 3 2025, FATHER GUSTAVE INEZA

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's Gospel brings us into the very heart of Jesus' mission.

In John 17:1–11, we witness Jesus lifting his eyes to heaven, praying not for himself alone, but for those whom the Father has entrusted to him. His prayer is filled with profound love and a deep sense of mission—to glorify the Father through his obedience and to safeguard those who will carry his message forward.

Jesus says, “I have glorified you on earth, by finishing the work you gave me to do.”

Dear friends, this recalls the life and death of the Ugandan Martyrs, whose courageous witness glorified God, even as they faced betrayal, misunderstanding, and death. Like Jesus, they remained faithful to the truth entrusted to them, even when it meant standing against the dominant traditions of their time and their kingdom.

When King Mwanga challenged the authority by which the young Christian converts acted, it echoed the very questions Jesus faced from the religious authorities:

“By whose authority are you doing these things?”

In both cases, loyalty to divine truth surpassed loyalty to human traditions. The Ugandan Martyrs understood that their ultimate allegiance was not to the royal court nor to cultural expectations, but to Christ, who offered them the fullness of life.

Yet, today's reflection wisely reminds us: the martyrs did not challenge cultural codes out of rebellion for rebellion's sake. Their actions came from a discernment of a greater good. They did not disrespect their

heritage. Rather, they found in Christ a fulfilment of their people's deepest spiritual longings—for truth, justice, and eternal life.

However, we must not romanticize the narrative. The Buganda Kingdom was a highly organized and noble society. The conflict was not simply primitive versus civilized, but a clash of different visions of loyalty, identity, and destiny.

Modern decolonial thinking invites us to honour the deaths of African traditions, even as we celebrate the martyrs' fidelity to Christ. The martyrs believed they should not renounce their faith, even when commanded by King Mwanga. The king, however, saw their refusal as a betrayal of traditional customs and loyalty to the kingdom.

When the young pages reported to the French Catholic missionaries that King Mwanga had orchestrated the assassination of Anglican Bishop Hannington, the missionaries confronted the king at court. This revealed that the secrets of the royal court had been disclosed.

While one might debate whether this constituted treason, it's important to recognize that in the context of kingdoms at that time, any court official who divulged state secrets could expect severe punishment.

King Mwanga also feared that both the French Catholic and British Anglican missionaries represented the vanguard of colonial influence, as had happened with the German Empire in neighbouring Tanganyika—a fear that history later confirmed.

Still, this historical context does not diminish the bravery and steadfastness of the martyrs in their commitment to their new faith. Without disparaging Ugandan traditions, it is both possible and necessary to honour the martyrs for their extraordinary courage and fidelity.

We should not feel invited to look down on the Ugandan court of the time. That court was highly structured and advanced—even before colonial times. In fact, to truly honour the martyrs is to respect the rich context from which they came.

In his prayer, Jesus asks the Father to protect his disciples “in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” This unity is not uniformity—it is harmony. A harmony in which diverse peoples and cultures find a common home in the love of God.

The Ugandan Martyrs remind us that faith must be enculturated. It must engage in respectful dialogue with the wisdom of the land and its people, while also inviting transformation where the Gospel demands it.

Today, we are called to the same fidelity. In a world where the voice of faith is often drowned out by competing allegiances—to politics, to culture, to personal gain—we are invited to lift our eyes to heaven, to seek unity in Christ, and to glorify the Father by the way we live, even when it costs us dearly.

May the example of the Ugandan Martyrs inspire us to courage, humility, and a love that glorifies God above all else.
May their memory teach us to honour our roots while allowing the Gospel to bear fruit in every culture.

And may we, like them, one day hear the words of the Lord:
“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Amen.