



An Ode to Father Olivier Maire, SMM: Recalling his Faith and Life Prints in Uganda

MBARARA, Uganda - On 17th August 2021, the Mbarara Community of Montfort Missionaries in Uganda gathered together with few religious around Mbarara to celebrate Holy Mass in honour of the life of Fr. Olivier Maire, SMM. Fr. Olivier had worked in Uganda as a Novice Master and also did his pastoral work around the community. It was a moment to celebrate the wonderful and transformative work of Fr. Olivier that came from his faith. The Holy Mass was led by His Grace Lambert Bainomugisha, the Archbishop of Mbarara Archdiocese together with few concelebrants. Confreres, religious men and women and lay people within Nyamitanga Hill participated in the Holy Mass. According to Archbishop Lambert, the life of Fr. Olivier has been an encyclopaedia, not only to the Montfortians but also to the entire church.

"Rev. Fr. Olivier's life has been a book of uncountable pages to you (Montfortians) and the whole church at large and it has been closed...", emphasised Archbishop Lambert.

Listening to the attributes made by the different people who knew Fr. Olivier, one gets the impression that he did not come to Uganda to teach something new to the people. However, what made his presence unique and distinct among the people around Nyamitanga Hill is how he lived on what he believed in. For many, his presence was the manifestation of what St. James wrote in his Letter (2:18). *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds."* His life and death is a clear example of faith and charity manifested. According to the Archbishop, Fr. Olivier gave everything without reservations. *"Olivier gave out everything to the master and he has ended up giving his life"*, the archbishop expressed in comparing the life of Fr. Olivier and the young man in the Gospel. He lived a selfless life that is full of multiple teachings of St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort.

Furthermore, Fr. John Mary Ahimbisibwe, SMM spoke about the faith prints of Fr. Olivier. He expressed how disheartened he was to see that a man who loved, cared for the marginalised, belittled in the society was no more. *"He loved prisoners and ministry to prisoners very much"*, Fr. John Mary said. Fr. Olivier, for the time he stayed in Mbarara, apart from being a Novice Master to some Montfortians, served and worked tirelessly for the young prisoners in matters of faith and material needs. He desired to be counted among and be identified with them. This empathetic attitude was so special that it cannot be found in any person. It was a gift of Fr. Olivier that makes him be remembered always as a great inspirer who lived the values of the Gospel.

Fr. Ernest Akhonya, SMM, who had been a novice and stayed with Fr. Olivier for a long time, explained the richness in spirituality that Fr. Olivier possessed. He was a man with immeasurable knowledge about Montfort and his teachings but above all, he was an unhesitant sharer and a leader of what he knew so as to enrich others. He was an expert in the writings of Montfort and lived what Montfort could have lived now. This kind of character of him makes Fr. Olivier supremely important in the congregation, and that, *"we have lost a treasure, irreplaceable indeed,"* he said.

Words cannot express fully who Fr. Olivier was to us and his beautiful marks; nobility in pastoral work, his togetherness will remain in our hearts. Finally, we can pray and emulate his character so that we can be like him, a man after the heart of our Lord. Rest in peace Fr. Olivier. We shall forever remember you in our hearts.

*Fr. Petro Chillumpha, SMM
Mbarara, Uganda*