



## **First Religious Profession in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

**KINSHASA, DRC** - September 8, 2024, when the Church celebrated the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time B, the Very Reverend Father DWI, our Superior General, presided over the Eucharist in the sub-parish of Sainte Philomène in Kinshasa, during which two Burundian novices: Brothers Guillaume NDAYIKEZA and Olivier CIZA made their vows in his hands. At this Eucharist, there was a remarkable presence of Fr. Lonely Paul MASHONGA SMM, the Assistant General in Charge of Africa and Fr. Guelord ASEME MUKE, SMM, Delegate Superior of the General Delegation of Francophone Africa, recently appointed by the Superior General for a second term.

We note in the Eucharist, the presence among others of Fr. Jean de Dieu BOKUMU SMM, Animator and Fr. Jean-Louis WENZA SMM, Vicar of the Sub-Parish; Fr. David GIAPUNDA SMM, Novice Master and Fr. Robert NATUTWANE SMM, Socius; Bro. Théophile MOLEPELIA SMM, Member of the Novitiate team and the Reverend Brother Provincial of the Montfort Brothers of Saint Gabriel, Bro. NDAMBU, accompanied by the other brothers. And as it is a Sunday mass, more than 500 faithful, lay and religious, men, women and children participated in this celebration, very well animated by the united

Choir of the Sub-Parish. In his homily, in light of the liturgical texts proposed, Fr. Guelord insisted on a message that everyone should make their own: “*Serve the Lord as long as you live,*” in reference to Psalm 145 (146). But to serve the Lord, Father recalled, one must place one’s faith and hope in the Lord who forgets no one, in whose eyes every person has value and who takes part in the situation of those whom society neglects and leaves to their sad fate, especially the poor.

Based on the Gospel of the day, like the people of the Decapolis territory who brought to Jesus the deaf man who also had difficulty speaking, Fr. Guelord invited the assembly to cultivate the gift of Communion. A community, he stressed, must be the place where people support each other to bring others to Jesus. Our way of living communion must serve as a criterion for evaluating our way of serving and praising the Lord. Is it the situation of others, the suffering of others, especially the poor, that challenges me? He continued his homily, evoking the withdrawal of Jesus with the deaf man, which reminds us that we should learn to maintain intimacy, face to face with Jesus, enter into the depth of our relationship with Christ in personal prayer. Because solitude and prayer prevent us from judging according to appearances.

Before the final blessing, Father Jean de Dieu honored Fr. Lonely Paul MASHONGA SMM by blessing a child. And the Fr. General and the Father Delegate blessed the faithful who brought their Bibles, since that Sunday was dedicated to the blessing of Bibles and their users.

The joy was immense within the sub-parish community of Sainte Philomène which, for the first time, was the beneficiary of organizing and attending the ceremony of the Profession of religious vows since its creation, 4 years ago. The Vice-President of the Parish Council, spoke on behalf of their community to express to Father General and his Assistant in charge of Africa, their feeling of joy and gratitude. While wishing them a word of welcome, he took advantage of this opportunity to describe the situation of poverty in this periphery which cannot acquire land for the construction of a church. With their few means, he said, they try to ensure the rent of the plot which welcomes the faithful for prayer and other activities under the sheds where during the rainy season, the faithful are exposed to the elements; sometimes in the middle of the Eucharistic celebration people get wet. He launched a cry to Father General and his Assistant in charge of Africa, to make their voice heard by people of good will who, in the name of the momentum of universal solidarity, can bring them help.

Speaking in turn on behalf of the Superior General and in his own name, Fr. Guelord, our Delegate Superior thanked the sub-parish community, recalling as during his canonical visit, that Saint Philomena is a work of God. He asked the faithful to look at Saint Philomena with the eyes of God and not with the eyes of a man, much less to stick the face of an individual to Saint Philomena. If it is his work, whether it rains or not, whatever the challenges, God will complete it. The Father Delegate acknowledged the problem of acquiring the land, but he urged the faithful not to despair and not to lose faith. One day, this problem will find a solution according to God's time, he stressed once again, he thanked this Community especially for its generosity, for the care of the two confreres: Fr. Jean de Dieu and Fr. Jean-Louis that it takes despite the difficult socio-economic situation.

Finally, the Father Delegate thanked Fr. David, Master of Novices and his entire team – Fr. Robert and Bro. Théophile - for everything they do so that our young people become Montfortians. He ended his speech by inviting the faithful to walk as a community, to allow God to accomplish his will.

A fraternal meal successful for the entire Montfortian family (Montfortian Fathers, the Brothers of Saint Gabriel) present in Kinshasa was shared with the friends and the sub-parish council of Sainte Philomène.

*Fr. Robert NATUTWANE SMM*