

# A martyr Church in the heart of Africa



Prayer Vigil on Dehonian Memorial Day

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This year, on Dehonian Memorial Day, besides praying and giving thanks for the witness of all the Dehonians who gave their lives for the faith and in service to others, we want to remember in a special way the Blessed Maria-Clementina Anuarite Nengapeta and the 28 Dehonians killed in 1964 during the Simba rebellion in Congo.

To understand and appreciate their testimony and their death, it is necessary first to take a look at the situation in the Congo at that time.

On June 30, 1960 the Congo obtained independence from the Kingdom of Belgium. The first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, a charismatic personality, remained in office for less than three months and was assassinated on January 17, 1961. In the following years numerous civil wars broke out, for ideological and ethnic reasons, combined with the still very strong presence of Belgium in the army, administration and economy, as well as the influence of the various Cold War powers, especially the United States, the Soviet Union, Cuba and China. All of this made a peaceful development toward true independence impossible.

Many Congolese had high hopes for independence, with the prospect of better living conditions, but they remained largely frustrated. It was in this context that from 1963 to 1965 the Simba rebellion conquered a large part of eastern Congo. Many rebel soldiers saw a continuity of colonial presence in the religious women and the missionaries dressed in white. The soldiers viewed them as possessing fearsome knowledge and powers that hindered the future of an independent Congo. This environment of social frustration, mistrust and power struggles opened the way to an explosion of violence, which in November 1964 victimized many missionaries, religious and catechists, including Blessed Anuarite and 28 Dehonians. Many of them could have escaped the violence by taking refuge in a big city, but they chose to remain in the unprotected missionary places, together with the Christian communities entrusted to their care. Their life is a witness to the Gospel, which embraces all people and cultures, beyond any nationalism, violence or ideology.

## Entrance song

## PENITENTIAL ACT

To approach the story of Blessed Anuarite, Bishop Wittebols, Fr. Longo and the other Dehonian martyrs in Congo means to approach a context of violence and death, a reality still tragically present in our world.

With humble hearts, in a time of silence, we ask the Lord's forgiveness for our infidelity as Christians and citizens, for our responsibility for today's evils. At the same time, as we confess our faults, we express forgiveness of the wrongs committed by others against us. In particular we pray for those who throughout history and still today despise, persecute and kill Christians because of their faith. We renew our commitment to offer our lives to be servants of reconciliation.

*After a moment of silence*

**Song: Mokonzi yoka mawa (Kyrie eleison)**

Mokonzi yoka mawa (2x)      Mokonzi e e, yoka biso mawa  
Kristu yoka mawa (2x)      Kristu e e, yoka biso mawa  
Mokonzi yoka mawa (2x)      Mokonzi e e, yoka biso mawa

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cALKhZrB6VE>)

*While each of the verses is sung/heard, a candle is lit and/or different elements used in African cultures for reconciliation rituals are presented: ashes, corn, fruits, a Bible...*

**Prayer**

We thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth,  
because in your Son Jesus  
you have revealed the mystery of your love.  
Transform us in Christ, servant of humanity,  
and give us a heart similar to his;  
let us be offered and available  
to announce your mercy.  
You call us to share the saving love of Christ  
in a life of oblation,  
grant that we might participate in his redemption  
with the offering of our life.  
Together with us you welcome  
the sufferings and expectations of the world.  
Welcome the efforts and hopes of the Church,  
the joys and sorrows of all humanity.  
Make us prophets of love  
and humble servants of reconciliation,  
on the way to the Easter of your kingdom. Amen.



## **A LIFE LIVED FOR GOD AND FOR OTHERS**

The martyrdom of the blessed Anuarite and the Dehonians who lost their lives during the Simba Rebellion has a meaning starting from a life given to the mission, and above all to the Lord. Like another woman: Ruth, the Moabite, they decided to stay with those in need, participate in the same destiny, form one people, and share faith in the same God. For Him they consecrated and offered their lives to the end, as we will hear in their own words.

### **Word of the Lord: *Ruth 1,1.3-6.14-16.22***

Once back in the time of the judges there was a famine in the land; so a man from Bethlehem of Judah left home with his wife and two sons to reside on the plateau of Moab.

Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah, the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion died also, and the woman was left with neither her two boys nor her husband. She and her daughters-in-law then prepared to go back from the plateau of Moab because word had reached her there that the LORD had seen to his people's needs and given them food.

Again they wept aloud; then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. "See now," she said, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her god. Go back after your sister-in-law!". But Ruth said, "Do not press me to go back and abandon you! Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God".

Thus it was that Naomi came back with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, who accompanied her back from the plateau of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

### **From the diary of blessed Maria-Clementina Anuarite Nengapeta**

"I consecrated myself to Jesus alone. I will therefore try to please him and recognize that everything that happens to me is his will. Have I not taken vows? To remain calm, in moments of joy as well as in difficulties, in the hour of illness as in the moment of trial. I must accept everything, yes! Is that not why I have come here? [...]"

Do not seek your joy anywhere other than in Jesus alone. Do not worry about anything. Know first of all what God wants from me when He orders me something. If I seek my joy outside of Jesus, know well, my soul, that you cannot find consolation. Jesus, give me a spirit of prayer and fidelity to observe my rule. Give me the strength not to trust myself by saying: 'There is no danger'. Virgin prudent, that I may be prudent... I will accept everything that happens to me, because it is God's will. I have come here to follow whom? The superior? The sisters? The little girls? All of humans? None of the above. Have I not come for my beloved, Jesus?"

### **The Servant of God Fr. Bernardo Longo to the students of Bologna (August 18, 1951)**

"It is difficult to tell you what the secret of missionary life is. I believe that it is Christ, mysteriously present in the missionary. Christ on the tongue, Christ in the heart, Christ at the altar, Christ at school. Christ in the city, Christ in souls, Christ between the small and the great, Christ loved and blessed in the hard struggle of spirit and flesh. Finding the mold to be a missionary is difficult. I try to attract the protection of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ.

Missionary life, taken seriously, is a heavy cross. I always try to return to supernatural principles... Prepare yourself in holiness, in peace, in the balance of your capabilities. But above all, pray in humility. Dear young people, the missionary is a madman/fool for Christ. He lives like Paul among all dangers and temptations. But he has Christ to comfort him”.

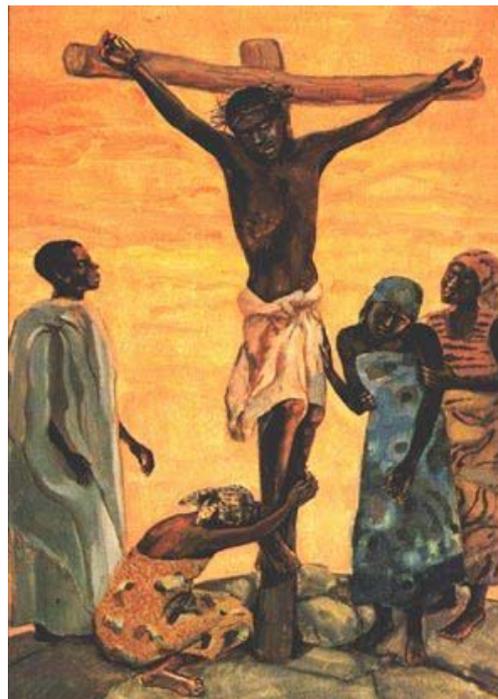
*Moment of silence*

### **Prayer**

Father,  
I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you:  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures.  
I wish no more than this, O Lord.  
Into your hands I commend my soul;  
I offer it to you  
with all the love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord,  
and so need to give myself,  
to surrender myself into your hands,  
without reserve,  
and with boundless confidence,  
for you are my Father.

*(Blessed Charles di Foucauld)*

### **Song**



## A LIFE GIVEN TO THE END

Besides Blessed Maria-Clementina Anuarite Nengapeta, the Servant of God Fr. Bernardo Longo and Bishop Joseph Wittebols, 26 other Dehonians were killed in November 1964. They are: Joseph, Frances, Amor, Herman, Gerard, Joseph, Henricus, Damian, Aloysius, John, Joseph, Henry, Jacques, Clement, Andrew, Jerome, Karel, Christian, Leo, Henry, John, Arnold, John, Peter, Arnolf and William<sup>1</sup>. We do not want to tell the chronicle of their killings. Instead, we find the meaning of their death in their attitude towards death. Some of their testimonies, as in the case of Blessed Anuarite, have been collected and presented to God's people as a whole. Others simply speak through their silent witness. In any case, the power of the Gospel shines in them, the promise of Christ that, even in the greatest persecution, we are not alone.

### ✠ **Word of the Lord: *Matthew 10,28-33***

And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.

### **From the homily of St. John Paul II during the beatification of Maria-Clementina Anuarite (August 15, 1985)**

"Anuarite had committed herself unreservedly to follow the Lord; she had given him her fidelity and consecrated her virginity. And, day by day, with affection and depth, she prayed to the Mother of Christ; she was seen as immersed in prayer beside the image of Our Lady, or attentive to pray the Rosary with her sisters or with the children she cared for. [...]

When the time comes for the trial, this young nun faces it. [...] She overcomes the upheaval of anxiety; her courage is without weakness, sustained by the affectionate presence of her superiors and her sisters. [...] In order to defend her superior, threatened because of her own refusal, she dares to say: 'You will only kill me'. When the mortal blows reach her, her sisters clearly hear these words addressed by her to those who strike her: 'I forgive you because you don't know what you do'; and again: 'It is as I willed'. In the most direct way, Anuarite follows the Christ to whom she has given herself: like him, she forgives, as he made his sacrifice. [...]

At the hour of the threat, she does not hesitate to place above all the value of her consecration to Christ in perfect chastity. On the evening of her death, in the blue house of Isiro, she said: 'I have renewed my vows, I am ready to die'. Anuarite is a firm witness of the irreplaceable value of a commitment made to God and sustained by His grace".

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<sup>1</sup>\* Fr. Joseph Tegels, Fr. Frances ten Bosch, Fr. Amor Aubert, Fr. Herman Bisschop, Fr. Gerard Nieuwkamp, Br. Joseph Vanderbeek, Fr. Henricus Verberne, Br. Damian Brabers, Br. Aloysius Paps, Fr. John Trausch, Fr. Joseph Conrad, Fr. Henry van der Vegt, Fr. Jacques Moreau, Fr. Clement Burnotte, Br. Andrew Laureys, Fr. Jerome Vandemoere, Fr. Karel Bellinckx, Fr. Christian Vandael, Fr. Leo Janssen, Fr. Henry Hams, Fr. John Slenter, Fr. Arnold Schouenberg, Fr. John de Vries, Fr. Peter van den Biggelaar, Br. Arnolf Schouenberg and Fr. William Vranken.

## From the writings of Mons. Joseph Wittébols

“He who hears this call, understands that his life will no longer make sense if he does not give. And the word ‘gift’ does not mean to give something, but to give yourself; and you do not give yourself partially. We have not given ourselves until we have given ourselves without reserve and without limits. Total donation to God. [...]

The attitude of total abandonment in an assent to the Father is truly the essence of the life of Our Lord. It is what makes Jesus the unique victim, without stain, the only one pleasing to the Father, the only one capable of redeeming humanity by repairing the offense done to God. To be a victim, he became human, and he witnessed with his whole life, from the initial *Ecce venio* to the *Consummatum est* on the altar of the cross. It is also the disposition of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the co-redeemer, whose life was totally guided by the will to realize the *Ecce ancilla Domini* of the Annunciation with love” (La donation totale, 61. 195).

“The good Lord has turned his eyes on everything that happens to us. Let us try to accept His holy will and offer our sufferings and sorrows for the good of the Church with a great love for Jesus. In this month of the Rosary I unceasingly join all of you through the Rosary to obtain the help and protection of Mary’s Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart. My heart is united with all of you and I bless each one of you paternally” (Letter of Bishop Wittébols to Fr. Longo, 15 October 1964).

*Moment of silence*

## Hymn (two-chorus) Psalm 51, 1-8

### Song: Nada te turbe

I give you thanks, LORD and King,  
I praise you, God my savior!  
I praise your name, refuge of my life,  
because you have ransomed my life from death;

You held my body from the pit,  
and delivered my foot from the power of Sheol.  
You have preserved me from the scourge of the slanderous tongue,  
and from the lips of those given over to falsehood.  
You were with me against those who rise up against me;  
you have rescued me according to your abundant mercy.

From the snare of those who look for my downfall,  
and from the power of those who seek my life.  
From many dangers you have saved me,  
from flames that beset me on every side,  
from the midst of fire till there was not a whiff of it,

From the deep belly of Sheol,  
from deceiving lips and painters of lies,  
from the arrows of a treacherous tongue.

I was at the point of death,  
my life was nearing the depths of Sheol  
I turned every way, but there was no one to help;  
I looked for support but there was none.

Then I remembered the mercies of the LORD,  
his acts of kindness through ages past;  
For he saves those who take refuge in him,  
and rescues them from every evil.

**Song: Nada te turbe**

### **Prayer of the Faithful**

O Lord Jesus, King of the martyrs, comfort of the afflicted, support of those who suffer for love of you and the Church, listen kindly to our prayers.

For those who are persecuted,

May you be their hope, that they may never fail in their struggle, nor waver in their faith,  
but also experience the sweetness of Your consolation.

We pray to you: **Hear us, Lord!**

For those who endure torment and violence, hunger and toil,

May you be the strength which instills certainty of the prize promised to those who  
persevere until the end.

We pray to you: **Hear us, Lord!**

For those who are subjected to moral duress,

May you be the light that illuminates their intelligence, so they may see the path of truth.

We pray to you: **Hear us, Lord!**

For those who are weary and oppressed.

Be You rest and strength to support their will, overcoming every crisis, every hesitation and  
tiredness.

We pray to you: **Hear us, Lord!**

For those who are unable to profess their faith openly and to practice Christian life regularly.

May you be the friendly voice who helps them, animates and heals them, and gives joy and  
peace.

We pray to you: **Hear us, Lord!**

May our prayer aid our suffering and persecuted brothers and sisters. May our fraternal solidarity  
make them feel that they are not alone so that they may freely serve and adore You, who with the  
Father and the Holy Spirit, live and reign for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Our father**

## Final prayer

Mary, Queen of martyrs,  
associated with the Son in a single martyrdom,  
accompany each of us  
on small and large occasions  
when our faithful evangelical witness is required.  
Comfort us with your Motherly love  
in the daily commitment to follow Christ,  
especially in complex and difficult situations.  
May the love of Christ,  
that animated the martyrs,  
be the lifeblood of our daily existence.

*(Saint John Paul II)*

## Final song:

*While the assembly prepares to leave the place, a recommended song is “Jerusalem” by Master KG in collaboration with Nomcebo Zikode. Written in venda language (spoken in South Africa and Zimbabwe) The singer turns to God asking to meet Him in the heavenly Jerusalem, fraternal home for all.*

*Jerusalem, my home. Rescue me, walk with me, don't leave me here.  
My place is not here, my kingdom is not here. Rescue me! Come with me.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCZVL\\_8D048](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCZVL_8D048)

