

OUR LADY OF SORROWS KIBEHO, RWANDA 1981–1983

The small country of Rwanda is seen by some as the heart of the continent and one of its most beautiful areas, where plantations of tea and coffee abound. Visitors have named it the Land of Eternal Spring. But at the time of the apparitions, the country was in a state of unrest. Statues of the Blessed Mother were mutilated or destroyed and priests, influenced by the propaganda of false theologians, were lax in their duties and beliefs. Only two devout priests maintained the true principles of the Faith and the teaching of sound doctrine, which influenced most of the people of Rwanda to the fervent practice of the Catholic Faith. To correct the morals of the region and to plead for the restoration of religion, the Blessed Virgin appeared to Alphonsine Mumreke who was seventeen years old. Alphonsine was a student in a school that was run by three nuns and various lay teachers. There she was known to have been very pious and to have shown a great love of the Mother of God.



THE FIRST APPARITION

The first apparition took place in the school on Saturday, November 28, 1981. Alphonsine was in the dining room serving her classmates that day when she was startled by a sweet voice that called her. Since she did not see anyone around her who spoke her name, Alphonsine went into the hallway and saw a most beautiful Lady who announced that she was the “Mother of the World,” and had come in answer to her prayers. Alphonsine described the Lady in this way, The Virgin was not white as she is usually seen in holy pictures. I could not determine the color of her skin, but she was of incomparable beauty. She was barefoot and had a seamless white dress, and also a white veil on her head.

Her hands were clasped together on her breast, and her fingers pointed to the sky. Later I was told by my classmates that I had been speaking in several languages: English, French, Kinyarwanda and others. When the Virgin was about to leave I said three Hail Marys and the prayer, Come Holy Spirit. She then rose to heaven like Jesus. Alphonsine remained kneeling in a state of ecstasy for more than fifteen minutes while the nuns and staff members attempted to rouse her. When Alphonsine finally began to stir and spoke of the apparition, the faculty thought she was sick.

THE SECOND APPARITION

Another apparition took place the next day, November 29, and was repeated almost every Saturday in December. During these visitations, Alphonsine's classmates attempted to test her by pricking her with needles or trying to burn her with matches. They also waged a subtle persecution by heaping upon her all types of verbal abuse, saying among other things that she had lost her mind. Eventually, because of various phenomena, which included sparkling lights and the appearance of a star, both faculty and students came to believe, and even gave Alphonsine their rosaries for the Blessed Virgin to bless. While the daytime visions took place in the dining room, the evening visits took place in the dormitory, in the room of Alphonsine. Eventually, as news spread about the miraculous events, the apparitions began to take place in the school yard where thousands gathered. To the surprise of all, Our Lady began appearing to another student, Anathalie Mukamazimpaka and then to Marie-Claire Mukangango who had been one of the most vocal opponents of the apparitions. Marie-Claire declared, as a result of an apparition, that "One must meditate on the Passion of Jesus, and on the deep sorrows of His Mother. One must recite the Rosary every day, and also the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, to obtain the favor of repentance."

Alphonsine experienced a mystical journey on March 20, 1982. After informing the nuns that she might appear to be dead while this was taking place, she would nevertheless be very much alive. During the eighteen hours in which this ecstasy took place, priests, nurses, religious and medical assistants for the Red Cross, all saw that Alphonsine appeared to be in a deep sleep, was rigid, and had clasped hands that could not be separated. Alphonsine later revealed that the Blessed Mother had shown her Heaven, Purgatory and Hell. During these visitations, the Blessed Virgin gave many messages for the world. Calling herself the Mother of the World, she announced that

the purpose of her visitations was to communicate a message of conversion through a life of prayer and confession, a life renewed by the Word of God and by works of charity and justice. The Blessed Mother told Marie-Claire that she was addressing herself to the whole world which is in revolt against God and is “on the edge of catastrophe.”

During other apparitions, Anathalie described the visions in this way:

In July 1982, and the following months, August 15, 1982, the feast of the Assumption, and again on September 4, and in January 1983, Our Lady showed us many things about the coming war. Often she talked in general that the world is bad, that people do not have love, contrary to what God shed His blood for; Our Lady insists as well on love. Our Lady talked about and showed us some visions of reality where people killed each other, blood running, fire burning on the hill, mass graves, skulls, beheaded bodies, skulls put apart.

Anathalie continued: “Our Lady appeared to remind us what we have forgotten. In her messages she insisted on prayer and on conversion, on penance and humility.”

The Blessed Mother’s last visit to the visionaries was on August 19, 1982, during which she revealed the consequences of those who would ignore what she recommended. Like the vision of Anathalie, the other visionaries also saw “a river of blood, people who were killing each other, abandoned corpses, trees all in flames, bodies without heads.” About a decade later, in the spring of 1994, a vicious civil war erupted in Rwanda in which an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 people were killed; many beheaded by machetes and dumped into the Kagea River. Many were killed by friends or neighbors in the genocide that lasted one hundred days. The Blessed Mother had also warned that sexual promiscuity would lead to disaster—this before the world experienced the AIDS epidemic. By 1994, Africa had 70 percent of the world’s cases. It is estimated that several million Africans fell victim to the disease. It was during the war that the visionary, Marie-Claire, was killed. It is said that she had married Elie Ntabadahiga in 1987, and had moved to Kigali to be with him.

According to eyewitnesses, Elie was taken prisoner by the militants, and when Marie-Claire begged for her husband’s release, she was murdered.

As for the other visionaries, Alphonsine is now a cloistered nun living in the Saint Claire convent of Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Her religious name is Alphonsine of the Glorious

Cross. Anathalie still lives in the Kibeho parish where she is dedicated to preparing the church and the altar for Holy Mass. It was after the civil war that the Catholic Church made a definitive ruling regarding the apparitions of Alphonsine Murmureka, Anathalie Mukamazimpaka and Marie-Claire Mukangango. Although four others are said to have witnessed the apparitions, approval for the visions of the original three was granted by Bishop Jean-Baptiste Gahamanyi who was in charge of the Diocese of Butare at the time of the visitations. On July 2, 2001, the Vatican released the declaration of Bishop Augustin Misago of Gikongoro who expressed approval of the visions after examinations were conducted by both medical and theological examiners. The original summary of their studies consisted of a twenty-three- page document. Bishop Augustin Misago declared, “There are more reasons to believe this than to deny it,” and that “the events corresponded satisfactorily to all the criteria established by the Church in the matter of private apparitions and revelations.” Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Rwanda in 1990, exhorted everyone to turn to the Virgin Mary as a sure guide to peace and salvation.