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MESSAGE FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF RWANDA TO THE FAITHFUL AT THE CLOSURE OF THE SPECIAL YEAR OF RECONCILIATION

“BE RECONCILED WITH GOD” (2 Cor 5:20)

INTRODUCTION

Dear priests, dear religious, dear faithful,

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ has asked us to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-16). From the moment of its establishment, the Church is called to continue this mission and exhorted to help the whole world to discover the fruits of love which are reconciliation, peace and justice (1Cor 13: 4-7). With the help of the Word of God it preaches and the sacraments it gives, the Church reconciles the faithful to God so that these first ones can in turn be reconciled with their hearts and between themselves.

2. We are finishing our triennial pastoral program started in 2016. The year 2016 was dedicated to the celebration of divine mercy; the year 2017, to the celebration of the Jubilee of the centenary of the priesthood in Rwanda and 2018 has been the special year of reconciliation

FIRST PART

RECONCILIATION AS A SECRET OF LIFE, JUSTICE AND PEACE

Dear priests, dear religious, dear faithful,

3. In the message we sent you at the beginning of 2018, we told you that our decision to dedicate this year to the pastoral program of reconciliation followed the great consequences caused by the history of our country and the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994. We also wanted to succeed in a true reconciliation which is a big secret of the life that everyone needs and which gives tranquility and lasting peace.

4. At the beginning of this special year of reconciliation, we said: *“the reconciliation is a long process which requires sufficient time, patience and divine grace.”* It is a lifelong process that helps us to improve our relationship with God by reconciling ourselves with Him, with ourselves, with our neighbors and with our environment. When a person succeeds in entering this mystery of reconciliation, he/she enters fully into the secret of life and regains tranquility and lasting peace.

5. According to the Holy Scriptures, in creating man, God had the plan to give him a quiet and peaceful life. For this reason, He recommended him the reconciliation as the only way to this secret. This involves that when he falls in sin, he has to become reconciled with God, become reconciled with himself, accept and accept his history, become reconciled with his fellow men and live in accordance with the environment which God created to him. The person who follows this process thereby accepts to reconcile with God.

6. According to the Old Testament, When Adam and Eve committed sin, God urged them to repentance and reconciliation with him in order to restore unity with him in the beginning. When the Israelites were on the way to the Promised Land, God sent them Moses, the judges, the kings and the prophets to help them keep his covenant and live peacefully. That covenant consisted of reconciliation with Him and stay United themselves. And of course, as long as these people reconciled with God, they lived in peace.

7. In the New Testament, the Gospels as well as the other New Testament writings always indicate reconciliation as the secret of life and the path to tranquility and peace. Before separating from his disciples, Jesus prayed that they would be one as He and his Father are one (John 17:21). He exhorted them to love by saying, “May you love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Love is also the fruit of reconciliation. Saint Paul also emphasizes reconciliation as the secret of life and tranquility that must characterize the children of God that he exhorts to support one another and to apply oneself to the unity based on Christ (ref. Eph 4:1-6).

8. Referring to the Holy Scriptures, we note that the teaching of Jesus as well as that of his disciples indicates reconciliation as the secret on which human life in general, and the Christian life in particular, are built. Each person who agrees to walk on this path of reconciliation with God, reconciliation with oneself, reconciliation with one's neighbor and reconciliation with one's environment is on the true path to the life of tranquility and peace. It is therefore for this path of reconciliation that the Catholic Church in Rwanda has particularly chose during this special year of reconciliation that we are closing.

SECOND PART

THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN RWANDA

Dear priests, dear religious, dear faithful,

9. We, Rwandans, thanks to the Gospel that we welcomed, we entered the secret of reconciliation that everyone needed in the aftermath of the tragic history of genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994 and the war our country has experienced. In fact, the process of reconciliation always begins with a realization of a failure to love God and the neighbour.

10. The three years that we are ending have been preceded by other pastoral programs which we settled over the years, by wanting to help the Christians in particular and every Rwandan generally, to reflect about the reconciliation starting from the history of discrimination, hatred, war and the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994 that characterized our country. You

remember that by celebrating the 2000 anniversary of the Gospel of Christ in the world and 100 years of evangelization of Rwanda, the Catholic Church in Rwanda undertook a special synod. Its main objective was to resolve disagreements between Rwandans caused the history of our country. At the end of that synod, the Church showed us and recommended the path of reconciliation as an effective remedy to our relations.

11. After the synod, all pastoral programmes were conceived and carried out in such a way as to concretize the recommendations of the Synod and to respond to the challenges raised by the faithful. We were generally aiming at helping Rwandans and particularly Christians to perfect the principle of reconciliation in restoring their relationship. The result was the compendium made by the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace that was published in April 2014, during the 20th commemoration of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994.

12. By undertaking this three-year pastoral program which we finish, we had the objective to improve the achievements of the synods of the year 2000, and especially the principle of reconciliation in the restoration of relations among Rwandans.

13. In the first year (2016) we celebrated the divine mercy, source of real reconciliation: “Be merciful, just as your father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). We also saw that the real reconciliation has to get fresh ideas in the mercy and the forgiveness, just like God forgives us without taking into account the gravity of our sins.

14. In the second year (2017), we celebrated the gift of the priesthood that God gave to the Church in Rwanda. We remembered that the priest must be the witness of Christ, the good pastor and the dispenser of divine mercy.

15. In this third year (2018) that we are finishing, each diocese has had its own pastoral program to help its faithful to reflect more on the secret of reconciliation in their daily lives. This program has arrived in families, ecclesial basic communities, movements of catholic action, at the priests, at the members of a religious orders, and in the other various groups of Christians. Here, we would like to thank, in general, all those who responded to it and the contribution which each one brought by helping others to perfect themselves in the process of reconciliation based on these four pillars which are: to reconcile with God, to be reconciled with oneself, to be reconciled with one's neighbor and to be reconciled with one's environment.

16. As we pointed out, the reconciliation is a long process. Even though we welcome the step already passed by Rwandans after the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994, we cannot refrain from saying that there is some more of things to do to arrive at the real reconciliation of the Rwandans.

THIRD PART

OUR COMMITMENT TO THE REAL RECONCILIATION IN THE FUTURE

17. Although it is acceptable that a step has been taken on the path of reconciliation, a lot of challenges still arise that prevent the real reconciliation of the Rwandans. Among them, we will list the discord in the families of the married, the problem of reconciliation between the victims

of the genocide and those who did it, the injustice by which some want to unjustly take ownership of the properties of others through endless judgments that sow discord among the neighbours... We must then take another step in solving these problems that still now bother the reconciliation of Rwandans.

18. True reconciliation is therefore the path we must understand and every Christian must know that it is a renewable process throughout his life. This process goes together with the prayer that helps us to be reconciled to God and to convert us as the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word, Our Lady of Kibeho constantly asked us when she appeared to us in Rwanda.

CONCLUSION

Dear priests, dear religious, dear faithful,

19. We are closing the special year of reconciliation, but the process does not end. We have to become reconciled with God. We will maintain this year's achievements. We will continue the prayer for peace and exchange ideas that can help us to make further steps towards real reconciliation. We entrust to the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word, the good fruits of this special year of reconciliation that is coming to an end.

May God bless you all!

Done at Kigali, on 17th November 2018
