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## **THE MESSAGE FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF RWANDA TO CHRISTIANS AT THE EVE OF THE RECEPTION OF RELICS OF SAINT THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS**

Dear Christians,

With great joy we send you this message to share you the honour we have, within the Catholic Church in Rwanda in particular and in our country in general, to host the relics of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus.

Indeed, the relics of this patron saint of the missions will be in our country from June 15 to July 30, 2018. We invite you to venerate this great saint with a deep rightful fervour.

### **Her message to us**

Saint Therese of the Child Jesus is a religious French Carmelite born in 1873 and died early at the age of 24 years, in 1897 at Lisieux in France.

This Saint who has also been proclaimed Doctor of the Church comes to us to remind us that, as Christians, our primary vocation is holiness. And she wants to prescribe us her little way to reach it. This is her specificity. The little way of St. Therese is a way to holiness that each of us could own by becoming a witness of love for Christ and for the neighbours, by trusting in the merciful God, fully aware that far from God the human being can do nothing worthy of Him.

Dear Christians,

Welcoming this Saint Therese among us, implies - according to her desire - renewing in us the love we owe to Jesus. Indeed, the spiritual teaching of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus is summed up in this motto: "*to love Jesus and to have him loved*". Thus, welcoming her in our home is renewing in us the love we owe to Jesus Christ. Let's approach her so that she reveals us her secret. This Saint of modern times knows very well how much we thirsty to love Jesus, our Saviour. With her, let's step forward in this love.

Moreover, Saint Therese comes to make us discover the big secret that will make us better know and love the Church, our Mother; as well as the common and fundamental mission which is incumbent on us, its children: *"(...) I understood that if the Church had a body, composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church had a heart and that this heart was burning with love. I understood that it was love alone that made the Church's members act, that if love were ever extinguished, apostles would not proclaim the Gospel and martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love includes all vocations and that love was everything, that it embraced all times and all places ... in a word, that it is eternal! ..."* (Ms B 03v)

From the authentic wisdom of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, we can learn how to love both God and our neighbours: *"Ah! Lord, I know that you do not command the impossible. You know better than I do my weakness and my imperfection; you know very well that never would I be able to love my sisters as you love them, unless You, O my Jesus, loved them in me. It is because you wanted to give me this grace that you made your new commandment. Oh! How I love this new commandment since it gives me the assurance that your will is to love in me all those you command me to love!*

*Yes I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to Him, the more also do I love my sisters. When I wish to increase this love in me, and when especially the devil tries to place before the eyes of my soul the faults of such and such a sister who is less attractive to me, I hasten to search out her virtues, her good intentions; I tell myself that even if I did her fall once, she could easily have won a great number of victories"* (Ms C 12v)

### **Lessons from her life**

We will learn from St. Therese of the Child Jesus not to give up in front of the suffering as painful as it may be, and that in love for Christ and our neighbours regardless the situation, suffering or joy .

This Saint may teach us not to separate from the love of Christ for fear of perils on the battle field (see Rm 8, 35). Saint Therese of the Child Jesus suffered a lot: when she was 4 years old, she lost her mother. She was sickly and died in great pain. However, it is astonishing that, despite her terrible pain, she grew admirably in love for Jesus and for her neighbours. All she suffered, she joined them to the passion of Jesus on the cross, and that was the great offering to God for the conversion of sinners. This is the little way she teaches us. This perseverance

of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus in suffering is a good lesson for our country that has gone through tragic times, her cross way *sui generis*.

Let us welcome her as a friend, a sister and a messenger whom Jesus sends us. Let's invite her to conquer our hearts so that she can offer them to our Lord Jesus, and thus achieve in our country her ultimate wish: *I would like to travel the earth, preach your name and plant on the unfaithful ground your glorious Cross, but, O my Beloved, a single mission would not be enough for me, I would like at the same time to announce the Gospel in the five parts of the world and even in the most remote islands ... I would like to be a missionary not only for a few years, but I would have been a missionary since the creation of the world up to the end of time ... But I would like above all, O my Beloved Saviour, I would like to shed my blood for you to the last drop ... » (Ms B 03r)*

Dear Christians,

It is a great chance that Saint Therese of the Child Jesus is visiting us during the time we are in the special year of reconciliation. Thus, let us be conquered by the Lord through her message. Let us refer to her so that she can assist us in our process of reconciliation with God, with ourselves and with our brothers and sisters.

We entrust you to the Virgin Mary, Queen of Kibeho.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus, pray for us.

Done at Kigali, May 18, 2018

**Your Bishops**

✘ **Philippe RUKAMBA,**

**President of the Episcopal Conference of Rwanda**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Butare**

+ *Rukamba*

✘ **Thaddée NTIHINYURWA,**

**Archbishop of Kigali**

+ *Thaddée Ntihinyurwa*

✘ **Servilien NZAKAMWITA,**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Byumba**

+ *Servilien Nzakamwita*

✘ **Smaragde MBONYINTEGE,**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Kabgayi**

+ *Smaragde Mbonyingitege*

✘ **Vincent HAROLIMANA,**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Ruhengeri**

+ *Vincent Harolimana*

✘ **Antoine KAMBANDA,**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Kibungo**

+ *Antoine Kambanda*

✘ **Célestin HAKIZIMANA,**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Gikongoro**

+ *Célestin Hakizimana*

✘ **Anaclet MWUMVANEZA**

**Bishop of the Diocese of Nyundo**

+ *Anaclet Mwumvaneza*