



**CONFERENCE EPISCOPALE DU RWANDA**

**Secrétariat Général**

**B.P. 357 Kigali / Rwanda**

**Tél. : (+250) 252 575 439**

**E-mail : [eglisecatholiquerwanda@gmail.com](mailto:eglisecatholiquerwanda@gmail.com)**

**MESSAGE FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF RWANDA TO THE FAITHFUL  
AT THE CLOSURE OF THE SPECIAL YEAR OF RECONCILIATION 2018  
“BE RECONCILED WITH GOD” (2Cor 5:20)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Dear priests, dear religious, dear faithful;

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ has assigned us a mission, that of being 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 is exhorted to help the whole world to obtain the fruits of love which are reconciliation, peace and justice (1Cor 13: 4-7). With the help of the Word of God which it proclaims and the sacraments it administers, the Church reconciles its faithful with God so that, in their turn, they can be reconciled with themselves and with their fellows.
2. We thus complete our three-year pastoral program begun in 2016. The year 2016 was dedicated to the celebration of divine mercy; the year 2017, to the celebration of the Jubilee of the first centenary of the gift of the priesthood in Rwanda; while 2018 was called the special year of reconciliation.

**FIRST PART: RECONCILIATION AS A MYSTERY OF LIFE, THE SOURCE OF  
SERENITY AND PEACE**

Dear priests, dear religious, dear faithful;

3. In the inaugural message that we addressed to you at the beginning of 2018, we told you that we were embarking on the journey for a pastoral program of reconciliation following the great consequences caused by the tragic history of our country, the culminating point of which was the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994. We would therefore like to arrive at reconciliation, which is the great secret of life that everyone needs and which gives serenity and lasting peace.
4. At the beginning of this special year of reconciliation in Rwanda, we pointed out that *“reconciliation is a long process that requires sufficient time, patience and divine grace.”* (No. 2) It is a lifelong process that helps us to improve our relationship with God by reconciling ourselves with Him, with ourselves, with our neighbours and with our environment. When a person manages to enter into this mystery of reconciliation, he/she enters fully into the mystery of life and therefore regains serenity and lasting peace.

According to the Holy Scriptures, in creating man, God had the plan to give him a life full of serenity and peace. But the man disobeyed God and excluded himself from this happiness by sinning by ambitions. For this reason, He prescribed him reconciliation as the only way

to this primordial secret. He must reconcile himself with God, be reconciled to himself, receive himself and accept his history, be reconciled to his neighbours and live in harmony with the environment that God has created for him as a necessary and didactic gift. The person who engages in this process thereby accepts to reconcile with God.

6. According to the Old Testament, when Adam and Eve committed sin, God exhorted them to repent and reconcile with Him in order to restore the unity they had with Him in the beginning. When the people of Israel were on their way to the Promised Land, God sent them Moses, the judges, the kings and the prophets to help them keep the way to the covenant with God, the source of serene life, in the peace, possible if only we are reconciled with God and within him. In fact, every time God's people returned to Him, they recovered peace and serenity.
7. In the New Testament, both in the Gospels and in other New Testament writings, teachings centred on reconciliation are often referred to as the secret of life and the path to serenity and peace. Before separating from his disciples, Jesus prayed that they would be one as He and his Father are One (Jn 17: 21). He gave them a new commandment: "As I have loved you, love one another" (Jn 13:34). Love is also the fruit of reconciliation. St. Paul, too, often returns to reconciliation as a mystery of the life and serenity to be characterized by the children of God. They are encouraged not to yield to divisions but to keep the unity founded in Christ (Eph 4: 1-6).
8. Referring to the Holy Scriptures, we note that the teaching of Jesus, but also that of his disciples, indicates the search for reconciliation as the foundation on which human life in general, and the Christian life in particular, is built. Every person who accepts to engage without this quest for reconciliation with God, with himself/herself, with his/her neighbour and with his/her environment, is on the true path of the life of serenity and peace. It is therefore to this pilgrimage of reconciliation that the Catholic Church in Rwanda has particularly taken place 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 we have received, have been able to enter into the mystery of the reconciliation that everyone needed in the aftermath of the tragic history of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994 and the war that our country has experienced. The process of reconciliation always begins with an awareness of a failure to love God and neighbour.
10. The three years that we are ending have been preceded by other pastoral programs that we have set over time, in order to help Rwandans in general and Christians in particular, to take into consideration the history of discrimination, hatred, war and genocide perpetrated against Tutsis in 1994 in our country, so as to reflect deeply on reconciliation. You remember at the celebration of the 2000 anniversary of the birth of Christ in the world and 100 years of evangelization of our country, the Catholic Church in Rwanda undertook a special synod. The main reason was the problem of ethnic divisions between Rwandans linked to the history of our country. At the end of this synod, the Church showed us and recommended the path of reconciliation as an effective remedy to our relationships.

11. After the synod, all pastoral programs were designed and carried out in such a way as to realize the synod's recommendations and respond to the challenges raised by the faithful. Through them, we intended to offer our contribution to help Rwandans in general and Christians in particular better embody in their private life and social relations the imperative of reconciliation in the name of God for humanity. The result was the compendium produced by the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace published in April 2014, during the 20th commemoration of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994.
12. In undertaking this three-year pastoral program, which we are completing, we aimed to strengthen and improve the achievements of the dioceses and synods of the year 2000, and especially to emphasize the importance of reconciliation in restoring relations between Rwandans.
13. During the first year (2016) our meditation focused on the mystery of divine mercy, the source of true reconciliation: "Be merciful, as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6: 36). By the fact that God forgives us whatever the gravity of our offenses, we have experienced how much the true reconciliation of people draws its strength and authenticity from divine mercy and forgiveness.
14. In the second year (2017), we celebrated with you all the gift of God's ministerial priesthood to the Church in Rwanda. The priest is, in fact, elected to be the witness of Christ, the good pastor and the steward of the Divine Mercy, and thus minister of reconciliation.
15. In this third year (2018) which we are closing today, each diocese has had the opportunity to choose pastoral activities that meet the expectations of the faithful by helping them reflect more on the mystery and reality of reconciliation in their daily lives. This program has joined the spouses in their homes, the neighbours in their basic ecclesial communities, the youth in the Catholic action movements and schools, priests, religious and other different groups of Christians in their usual environment. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all those who have responded to our invitation and have personally given their orderly contribution to help their communities to engage in each step of the process of reconciliation based on these four pillars: reconciling with God, to be reconciled with oneself, to be reconciled with one's neighbour and to be reconciled with one's environment.
16. As we have experienced, reconciliation is a long process. Even if we welcome the step already taken in this area by Rwandans after the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994, we could not help recognizing that there is still much work to be done to reach a full reconciliation of all Rwandans.

### **THIRD PART: OUR COMMITMENT FOR FULL RECONCILIATION**

17. Even though much has been done in the area of reconciliation, it is clear that there are still real challenges to the full reconciliation of Rwandans. Among them we will mention: family conflicts in the broad sense and specifically between the spouses, the problem of reconciliation between the victims of the genocide and those who perpetrated it, the greed for gain and the injustices that pepper the endless land conflicts in courts and tribunals sowing and / or often fuelling conflict between relatives and neighbours. Another step is

therefore required from everyone in solving these problems that hinder the full reconciliation of Rwandans.

18. True reconciliation must tend to perfection. It is a commitment that requires constant dynamism both in the understanding and in the life of which every believer must become aware. This process goes hand in hand with the prayer that helps us to be reconciled with God and commits us to sincere and permanent conversion as the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word, Our Lady of Kibeho has constantly solicited us when she appeared us in Rwanda.

## **CONCLUSION**

Dear priests, dear religious, dear brothers and sisters in Christ;

19. We are closing the special year of reconciliation, but the process is not over here, quite the contrary. It is essential that we keep on reconciling ourselves with God. We are committed to building on the results of this special year. We will always focus on prayer for peace and the exchange of ideas so that we can take further steps on the road to reconciliation. We entrust to maternal solicitude of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word, the good fruits of reconciliation gathered in this special year that is coming to an end.

God bless you!

**Done at Kigali on November 17, 2018**

---