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MESSAGE OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF RWANDA TO THE FAITHFUL DURING THE 25TH COMMEMORATION OF THE GENOCIDE PERPETRATED AGAINST THE TUTSI IN 1994

INTRODUCTION

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. This year, for the twenty-fifth time, we commemorate the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994. The last three years of special pastoral care were intended to prepare us for this commemoration by rebuilding our unity. And we had to strengthen our belief in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, and act in brotherly love. This time, your bishops send you this message to tell you that memory is a duty in the life of every Christian, especially that of Rwandans. Thus, in our process of unity, we must be in good relationship with God, bring ourselves closer to the mystery of the Passover of our Lord.

2. Over the past three years, we took time to reflect on and receive the Divine Mercy (2016), to reflect on the gift of the priesthood and to show its role in the reconciliation process (2017) and in the special year of reconciliation we prayed and did other charitable activities in deepening this unity (2018).

In the meantime we have not ceased to remind you that God wanted to be reconciled with men by giving us his only Son, Jesus Christ, High Priest, to lead us to a reconciliation from the bottom of our hearts. Christ also instituted the sacraments of the Eucharist and the Priesthood to reconcile us to Himself and to make us reconcile among ourselves. Let us move in this way of reconciliation because it is a process that we must smooth and continue.

We thank you for continuing to repent and ask forgiveness. And here we urge all of our faithful to do this and to demonstrate a Christian's behaviour in the elimination of ethnic discrimination and marginalization, which led to this genocide that we remember.

REPENTANCE, REQUEST OF PARDON AND THE FORGIVING ARE OUR DUTY

3. What happened to us who are baptized and who share the Holy Eucharist should not have happened. Some of us fell into the trap of ethnic segregation that led to the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994. Thus, after feeling the weight of the harm inflicted on our innocent

brothers and sisters, we decided to return to the authentic character of a Christian, which is the love of God and our neighbour, and we have taken the appropriate measures. "Love one another as I have loved you," asks Jesus Christ (Jn 15: 12). We took time to repent and ask for forgiveness and we continue to ask forgiveness for our faithful involved in this genocide. For us Christians, we entrust ourselves very much to the saving power of divine mercy. So, in memory of those who perished in the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994 and its consequences, we must continue to ask for forgiveness and to forgive, because it is our obligation as Christians.

We can only rejoice at the fact that some Christians have been taken as role models at the national level. They showed courage during the genocide perpetrated against Tutsis in 1994 by going beyond ethnic boundaries. There are even others who are known, who were with them and who, sooner or later, will also be recognized for their good conduct during these tragic moments. These are good seeds that God has sown in our Church, for there are even some who have sacrificed themselves to the point of losing their lives. Remember that these good examples serve us to show us Christian virtues that can be models for others.

RECONCILIATION AS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS.

4. So many good things have been done to restore relations between Rwandans and their good cohabitation. In the aftermath of the darkness in which the country was plunged by the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994, the Light of the risen Christ did not go out. Asking for forgiveness and forgiving are becoming more and more culture for the preparation of a good future for all. However, after these 25 years, no one can admit that the process of reconciliation is already over. Celebrating our current results should not blind us to challenges that are not yet resolved.

There are still those who struggle with physical and moral wounds, who always need help so that they can accept themselves and fully reconcile with others. There are also other people who have become captives of the ethnic discrimination that they express through their language and behaviours that hurt their neighbours and that ignite the ideology of genocide. However, a notorious step has already been taken. On top of that, the strength and will demonstrated by many people make us hope that the Christian virtues supported by civic education can engender a good fraternity in this process of reconciliation on which we embarked.

THE EASTER OF OUR LORD, OUR HOPEFUL WAY

5. The past 25 years of commemorating the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 often coincided with Easter, when we remember the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is where our faith rests. In front of genocide and its consequences, the true Christian discovers a refuge in the death and resurrection of the Lord. May the Easter of Jesus Christ, witness to the love that he has shown us until death, continue to help us hope for our triumph over the evil and hatred that has dominated the macabre history of our country. And so, the love of our neighbour and the respect of God heal us from the wounds caused by our bad past. Jesus said, "What I command you is to love one another" (Jn 15:17).

THE ROLE OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE PERFECTION OF THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS

6. At baptism, we received the Holy Spirit in order to be guided by faith (Ep.4: 4-6). The Eucharist we usually receive builds our unity, confirms our fraternity and facilitates our journey towards reconciliation. This sacrament of love that we share gives us the strength to be reconciled with those with whom we have a trial and renew our relationship. Certainly, the Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life because "the Holy Eucharist contains all the spiritual treasure of the Church, that is, Christ Himself who is our Passover, the living bread, He, whose flesh, vivified by the Holy and Life-giving Spirit, gives life to men, inviting them to offer, in union with Him, their own life, their work, and all creation".

The 25th anniversary of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994 takes place as we prepare for the International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Budapest, Hungary, next year. This 52nd International Congress, which will give us time to reflect more specifically on the Eucharist, will focus on the words of the psalm: "All do in you their abode" (Ps 87:7). This theme will help us understand the importance of the Holy Eucharist in Christian life and mission.

In the Catholic Church of Rwanda, we will seize this opportunity to continue to reflect on the fact that Jesus Christ, whom we receive in the Eucharist, unites us and reconciles us. "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17). This unity in Christ leads us to an unlimited fraternity because the Holy Eucharist constantly maintains it and makes us understand the importance of the existence of God between men.

25 YEARS IN THE AFTER THE GENOCIDE PERPETRATED AGAINST TUTSI

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

7. We, your Bishops, have never stopped during all these years to exhort people implicated in this genocide to repent and to dare to ask forgiveness. We thank those who responded positively to our exhortation. They were released morally as it has been the case for the victims. We also thank those who had the courage to forgive, they liberated themselves morally. They are healed of moral wounds and have been able to approach God and their neighbours who had inflicted on them evil.

In short, the path of prayer and forgiveness is the source of the strength needed to continue to facilitate the process of unity and reconciliation and to heal existing wounds. There are still people struggling with the wounds of the genocide and its consequences. We hope that there are people who stay close to them, comforting them in their pain and accompanying them in their moral recovery, especially for orphans and widows.

There are also people who are in prison following the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. There are some who are elderly and some who have been affected by different diseases. All of

these people need help by looking at how their sentences can be alleviated. However, we exhort them to continue asking for forgiveness and reconcile with those with whom they have had a trial. We are also very sorry to hear that some of them have been abandoned by their families who no longer visit them. We thank the Christian groups who help them in their place and we urge all Christians not to forget them.

During this process of reconciliation in which we are engaged, we think back to the families of the newlyweds. They are the cradle of love, unity and fraternity for which people marry. It is in this context that, in evangelization and civic education, particular attention must be given to the reconciliation of Rwandans and the healing of wounds inherited from our bad history, starting with the families of the newlyweds. Our youth come from these families, they live according to the model inherited from their parents. If we educate them properly without discrimination, they will have a bright future. Let us save them from a bad inheritance, educate them to good relations and cohabitation, patriotic spirit and the pursuit of good.

CONCLUSION

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

8. In commemorating for the twenty-fifth time the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994, we, your Bishops, ask you to meditate more on the love and the divine mercy which are always manifested in a sincere love towards our neighbour.

If this genocide that we commemorate was due to lack of love for our neighbour and hatred resulting from ethnic discrimination, the remedy and the fine we can give are to build our Church on love and to act in the manner of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13).

What happened during the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi and its consequences caused suffering and sorrow, destroyed life and social relations between Rwandans. We, Christians, have a special duty and mission. Mostly, we must be "merciful as our Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36), then Christians who testify to the love of Christ for the world through their behaviour (see Jan 15: 9-17). This is the main cure that heals wounds, brings people together and makes peace between neighbours.

May Holy Mary, Our Lady of Kibeho, she who showed us her closeness and took pity on us, help us to smooth our way towards unity and reconciliation and to celebrate the step already taken by projecting more achievements in the search of the very good future for all.

Done at Kigali on March 25, 2019

Solemnity of the Annunciation

Your Bishops.