

This is the paper I presented at the Conference for the " Brotherhood " Congregation in a congress at Kabgayi Major Seminary on January 3, 2015, about how people have forgiven and begged pardon in Mushaka parish after the genocide perpetrated against people from Tutsi Ethny in Rwanda and then reconciled.

When Christians were preparing the 2000th anniversary celebration of Christ's birth, I screamed saying that Rwandese Christians will celebrate such events in hypocrisy and lies unless they sit down first and share about ethnic problems in the country. which was the source of the genocide perpetrated to people from Tutsi ethny. How to celebrate such holy event when those who perpetrated genocide didn't want to beg pardon or to recognize that genocide against people from Tutsi ethny occurred? The victims of genocide themselves were not ready to forgive. To celebrate such an event without sitting down first and sharing about the ethnic problems in the country and then in the church, (if the church had overcome ethnic problems and really had been a prophet, the genocide against people from Tutsi ethny would not have occurred.) To ignore that reality would be to maintain Christians in hypocrisy. They needed to be helped to forgive one another and beg pardon.

My voice has been understood, I had an invitation from those who were preparing the Christians for such a celebration; it was the commission created by the Episcopal Conference in Rwanda . I went and gave a conference to them speaking to them that they could not go on preparing the Christians to celebrate the anniversary celebration of the 2000th year of Christ 's birth because such event is a holy one and the Christians were in lie and hypocrisy. Some were not ready to forgive after the genocide perpetrated against people from Tutsi ethny; others didn't recognize that they were sinful when killing people during that genocide time. The ethnic problem was like a great stone on the way of the road to celebrate that anniversary in Rwanda. Those who had been given the mission to prepare the 2000th Jubilee feast from the Episcopal conference in Rwanda were confused after attending my conference, and realized that it was really not true to go on leading Christians in lies and hypocrisy. They shared their problem to the Episcopal Conference and the Commission preparing the Christians for the Jubilee celebration at a meeting with the Bishops at Kabgayi Diocese. After the meeting it was concluded that before the anniversary celebration of the 2000th year of Christ 's birth the church in Rwanda had first to have a Synod on ethnic problems and encourage Christians to forgive and beg pardon after genocide perpetrated against people from Tutsi Ethny. I have been involved in that commission to prepare the anniversary celebration and was the permanent secretary of the Synod in Cyangugu Diocese.

Synod on Ethnic problems in Rwanda in Cyangugu Diocese.

The synod on Ethnic problems in Cyangugu Diocese was well done. We shared about ethnic problems without shame. As permanent secretary of synod in the Diocese I helped people to be open, respectful, and to avoid lies and hypocrisy when discussing. I was the pastor at Mushaka Parish. At the end of that Synod we concluded that to belong to one ethny or the other is not a problem. You do not have to hate someone because he/she did not belong to your own ethny. No one has chosen his/her ethny. We had to respect one another. To be Hutu or Tutsi had to be no longer a problem.

We realized those who had to chosen to kill people because of their ethny didn't realize that each one is created in God's image and they have dishonored God who created people by killing . We had to think about how to help such people.

How to forgive

When there has been violence in society, the one who has been offended must forgive first, because usually that person becomes strong spiritually first. The survivors of the genocide against people from Tutsi ethny have not first understood that. They began to understand that by the testimony I gave them. I am a survivor of the genocide perpetrated against people from Tutsi ethny. I forgave the murderer of my mother during the genocide time; I take care of his 2 children; I payed school fees for them because their mother died when the father was in jail. He is still there. If I

didn't take care of them they could not study. The boy has made professional studies; he can now work in his life. The daughter is studying medicine at the University because, she wants to be a doctor. I continue taking care of her by paying her school fees.

When you forgive you have to be merciful. This testimony helped so many of the survivors in my parish; when you are pastor you have to preach by example. They began also to forgive. The survivors of the genocide asked me to drive them to District Rusizi Prison in order to forgive those who killed their relatives. I had showed them that forgiveness makes you free. A daughter, after listening to me preaching, decided to go and live with a mother whose husband had been killed by her father. She has been to help her and to console her because she was alone. That widow was still with one boy who was serving in the army. When the boy came to visit his mother he met the daughter at home and saw how she was taking care of his mother. Every time he came to visit his mother he saw that his mother was happy with the daughter. Finally the young soldier made a decision to get married with that daughter. Even if her father killed his father, she loved his mother, took care of her, and loved him as well. They got married. They are happy with 2 beautiful sons. The elder is Mahoro, "peace" in my mother language. I am the Godfather. I was happy by this good example. The good one began to triumph over the bad one in my parish.

SOS! All killers have been out of jail !

Three survivors of the genocide against people from Tutsi ethnicity came to me after morning mass full of fear and told me, "Father, We are afraid!" All those who killed our relatives, parents, wives, and children have been set free, they are no longer in jail. They are at home! They arrived yesterday! I invited them to come with me to my office and listened to them. They told me that if the killers were free from jail, they were going to kill them because no survivor of the genocide had to live. Those who were living could reveal how the genocide occurred. If you want to help someone in torment you first show him that you understand his problem, that his problem is real, and serious! I told them that very soon I was going to address that problem. So I did.

Retreat with survivors of genocide perpetrated against people from Tutsi ethnicity in Rwanda.

I invited the survivors of the genocide to a retreat. I preached to them and the theme we used for the retreat was Romans 12:21, "Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil by good." They attended workshops and shared how people from Hutu ethnicity had been so unjust to them. How they hated them. How they have been with no mercy to kill children, etc..... After that I asked them if they wished them also to be killed? They answered me saying that they don't want them to be killed. They wanted them to live; but, they needed to be converted and stop killing people. This made me happy because the good one went on triumphing over the bad one. I promised them I would announce their desires to those who had made genocide the next Sunday at mass and it has been so. I then invited the perpetrators of genocide to their own retreat.

Retreat with the perpetrators of genocide to people from Tutsi ethnicity.

After a retreat with survivors from the genocide, I invited the perpetrators of the genocide to people from Tutsi ethnicity to a retreat also. The same word in Rm 12: 21 "Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil by good " had to lead us. I sent them to workshops. They also had to give a message to the Christians who were afraid of them. When coming from the workshops, the first thing they asked me to do was to ask the congregation during Sunday mass to have mercy on them and to look at them once more as humans. If they were free from prison they did not come to kill people once more. Instead they were ready to reveal the truth of what happened in the genocide and how it had occurred. This brought peace to the parish; especially to the survivors from the genocide.

Retreat with survivors from genocide , perpetrators of genocide and rescuers of people from Tutsi ethnicity during genocide time.

It took time for me to organize such a retreat. First I was thinking how to organize a retreat with the survivors of genocide together with the perpetrators of genocide; but had been hesitant thinking that they were not ready for such a retreat. Led by Holy Spirit I realized if there were survivors from the genocide of people from Tutsi ethnicity it was because people from Hutu ethnicity had rescued them. Those rescuers had to be moderators in the retreat of survivors and perpetrators of genocide to people from Tutsi ethnicity. Holy Spirit was enlightening me.

I invited all of them to a retreat at the parish. When arriving in the room for the retreat I invited the survivors of the genocide to stand up and go in front in order to welcome the participants at the retreat. Rescuers and those who made genocide to people from Tutsi ethnicity were all from Hutu ethnicity. I then invited the rescuers, from Hutu ethnicity, to go stand next to the survivor he had rescued during the genocide time. I saw how the rescuers went proudly, and happily, to the one he had rescued. It was interesting to see one survivor from Tutsi ethnicity surrounded by 5,6,7,8,9 Hutu . It was so difficult to rescue one from Tutsi ethnicity during the genocide time. You tried to hide them and when you were suspected you sent them to your friend and he was also suspected. The victim would be sent to another one and so on until they had been rescued. So each survivor was surrounded by a team of rescuers from Hutu ethnicity.

I asked those who had perpetrated the genocide to see. The good Hutu's, who were good Christians, instead of killing their brothers and sisters in faith, they were rescuing them. At this, some who made genocide wept. I asked the survivors of the genocide if all people from Hutu ethnicity were bad people as they used to say? All together they replied that those surrounding them were good people because they rescued them. This was a way to help them to go on thinking about not letting evil defeat them. Once more I preached to them, again helped by that word in Rm 12, 21 "do not let evil defeat you; instead , conquer evil by good" .

They went into workshops to share and see what message they wanted to give to the parish congregation for beginning a new life after the genocide perpetrated to people from Tutsi ethnicity in Rwanda. After they workshops they concluded that after the genocide to people from Tutsi ethnicity they had as Christians to forgive and beg pardon. Christians in Mushaka parish entered in Gacaca court ready to forgive and beg pardon . The truth of the genocide had to be revealed. The Gacaca court were well done because Catholic Christians were very involved and helping. The retreats done in the parish had been fruitful in Gacaca court.

Unity and reconciliation in Mushaka parish:

In Gacaca court our Christians accepted they had killed people from Tutsi ethnicity during the genocide time. This was a scandal! To kill somebody because of who he is; is to be against God who created people . I invited those leaders in the church communities to debate this problem. The leaders of the church communities concluded by saying that those who had made genocide to people from Tutsi ethnicity had to stop getting holy communion. They had to wait and first get catechesis reminding them of their mistakes as Christians when they had killed their brothers and sisters during the genocide time. The period of that catechesis was for 6 months. When they have reached the half way point at three months of that catechesis they have a break. During the break they return to the families where they had killed people during the genocide time and beg pardon. The victim is afraid at first of the killer of his father, mother, brother or relative This exercise to go and meet the victim is to help heal the victim. The killer has to be merciful to the victim. This heals him, is healed by the welcome in the victim's family. Sometimes it is a very difficult but other Christians are there to help . In fact, both are closed and the victim has the key to open to the killer saying to him" I forgive you." The killer has the key to open to the victim saying to him " I beg pardon." After that short break the perpetrator of genocide comes back to the parish accompanied by the victim, who claims that he is no more afraid of him, they are merciful to one another. At this, the perpetrator of genocide goes on with catechesis.



The last instructions of that catechesis, the perpetrator of genocide and his victim come together. They prepare themselves for the great event, Unity and Reconciliation. When the perpetrator of genocide begs pardon to God because of the horror he has done in the genocide, the victim is laying his hands to him praying sincerely for him. It is the widow, or the orphan who realize the pain he has made to them who can sincerely say to him, "We forgive". Sometimes during this, the victim, as well as the perpetrator of genocide, are weeping. It is then new life! One who forgives does that forever and one who begs pardon does that also forever. Tutsi and Hutu are living peacefully in Mushaka parish.



Mushaka parish has written a book in our mother language "Imbabazi mu gusana iteme ry'imibanire myiza y'abanyarwanda" showing how to help people to forgive and reconcile one another after horror such as genocide. It will be translated into English in order to help English speakers. What is needed is money. When the money is there it will be translated and you will be able to get it. It will help every one who wants to fight and stop violence wherever it occurs. People from Mushaka Parish have already begun teaching and witnessing their experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation to other parishes. The first one to witness the blessings from forgiveness and reconciliation after having helped by people from Mushaka Parish is Ntendezi Quasi Parish. In Ntendezi Quasi Parish the perpetrators of genocide to people from Tutsi ethnicity decided to beg pardon to the church, and to the survivors of the genocide with the weapon they used in killing in their hands. Those instruments they used in killing people during genocide time will be taken to the memorial of genocide where people visiting the victims of genocide will visit as well those instruments they used to kill them. To take them out of their home is a sign that the good one triumphs over the bad one; that genocide will never happen again. Those killing instruments in their hands are signs of the darkness in their heart during the genocide time. The light in their other hand is a sign of their new life after making the decision to beg pardon and to reconcile themselves with God, the survivors of the genocide and with all Rwandese society.





In Mushaka parish the parishioners shared PARMEHUTU Ideology and concluded at the end of their workshops that in former times to be Hutu or Tutsi was not a problem. It was a social level. You could move from Tutsi level (which meant someone who was considered rich) to Hutu level (which meant less rich or poor.) When you became enough rich you moved from Hutu level to Tutsi level. It has been from colonization that what Rwandans considered a social level became ethny. This error has been exploited by PARMEHUTU political party, the party which taught hatred between Hutu and Tutsi in order to get power . The people from Tutsi ethny have fled the violence of Hutu people in PARMEHUTU party.

The Rwandese church will suffer for a long time because it has not been a prophet to fight such ideology which really was against the Gospel. We have to love each other, a party which teaches hatred should not be blessed by Christians. It is a pity! Christians have been involved and this allowed the genocide to people from Tutsi ethny. We go on suffering from that. Mushaka parish could not keep silent, the solution for such spiritual disorder is in forgiveness and reconciliation. We do not have to stay stuck with our historical error.

People from Mushaka parish are free from hypocrisy and lies in their hearts, praise God! Myself, I am healed from inner wounds because of Christians of Nyamasheke parish, for whom I was the pastor in genocide time, and have killed their brothers and sisters in faith. Once more with Mushaka parish I preached to Christians and realized how people rise from darkness to light; how they can forgive and beg pardon after genocide to people from Tutsi ethny. we have to have shepherds to help sheep. People are good when helped to connect to God. That is what I had to share with you.

Fr. Ubald Rugirangoga
The Secret of Peace Center
Cyangugu Diocese
Rwanda
Central Africa