



When Nuns Give out Bread but Receive Gunfire in Return

By Lourine Oluoch and Agencies

On Tuesday, March 13, Pope Francis gave his approval for the canonization of five new saints including Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

Mother Teresa's canonization will take place in Rome on September 4, 2016. Her work among the "poorest of the poor" won her worldwide acclaim.

Even as the Missionaries of Charity celebrate the soon to be canonization of their founder, a dark cloud hangs over their heads; the recent murder of four of their nuns in Yemen.

On March 4, two gunmen attacked Missionaries of Charity's convent and nursing home in Aden, Yemen killing Sr Anslem, Sr Judith, Sr Marguerite Mukashema, and Sr Reginette, along with sixteen other victims.

According to the Associated Press, 16 people were killed, including the driver and at least two other community helpers. Each victim was found handcuffed and shot in the head.

According to a statement from the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia, Sr Anslem from Ranchi, India would have turned 60 years old on May 8. Sr Judith from Kenya had just turned 41 years old on February 2. Sr Marguerite from Rwanda would have been 44 years old on April 29. The youngest nun, Sr Reginette, was from Rwanda and would've turned 33 on June 29.

The four nuns, who have come to be known as Mother Teresa martyrs, were caring for the elderly and disabled at the convent's home care center, together with volunteers where they served around sixty to eighty patients of all religions.



◀ “They were serving all poor people irrespective of their religion. Their duty was to help the poor,” a representative from the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia told CNA.

On March 6, following his Angelus address, Pope Francis prayed for Mother Teresa to accompany in heaven, the four Missionaries of Charity murdered in Yemen.

“I express my closeness to the Missionaries of Charity for the great loss that has affected them two days ago with the killing of four sisters in Aden, Yemen, where they were assisting the elderly.”

“I pray for them, for the other people killed in the attack, and for their family members,” the Pope said.

An earlier message signed by the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, said the Holy Father was “shocked and profoundly saddened to learn of the killing of four Missionaries of Charity and twelve others at a home for the elderly in Aden.”

“He prays that this pointless slaughter will awaken consciences, lead to a change of heart, and inspire all parties to lay down their arms and take up the path of dialogue.”

“In the name of God, he calls upon all parties in the present conflict to renounce violence, and to renew their commitment to the people of Yemen, particularly those most in need, whom the Sisters and their helpers sought to serve. Upon everyone suffering from this violence, the Holy Father invokes God’s blessing, and in a special way extends to the Missionaries of Charity his prayerful sympathy and solidarity,” the statement said.

“The nuns will be remembered as martyrs,” Bishop Smaragde Mboniyenge of Rwanda told Rwanda’s *The New Times*.

Two of the deceased nuns were from Rwanda: Sr Marguerite Mukashema, was from Kivumu Parish in Kabgayi Diocese while Sr Reginette was from Janja Parish, Ruhengeri Diocese,

“We were informed of their deaths by the Apostolic Nuncio. We deeply regret their deaths but stay proud for their sacrifice that resulted in deaths. We consider them martyrs and they are,” he said on March 7.

“They have set a good example of selflessness, serving in such an unsafe country. That spirit compelled them to stay for the sake of others though they could have left,” Bishop Mboniyenge said.

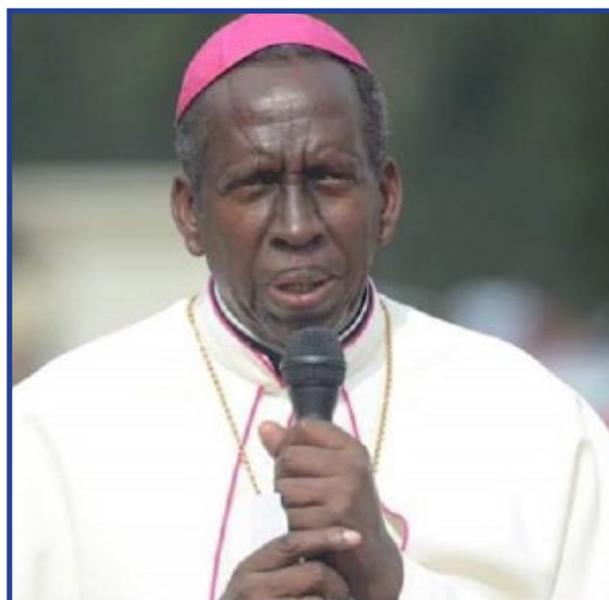
Leaders of the Catholic Church on the Arabian Peninsula on the other hand expressed dismay at the indifference world opinion has shown in response to the murder of nuns in Yemen.

In an interview with international Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need, Bishop Camillo Ballin, who is responsible for the northern part of the region, said: “No one has lifted a finger. It doesn’t interest anyone when it is Christianity that is under attack.



“Live within in your means and give the excess that God has blessed you with to help the less fortunate. You can put this quote into action by putting a budget and giving plan in place.”

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta



“They have set a good example of selflessness, serving in such an unsafe country,” Bishop Smaragde Mboniyenge of the Catholic Diocese of Kabgayi, Rwanda ▶▶

◀ The same thing happened to Jesus. They all abandoned him. And this is what is now happening to the Church.”

The prelate, a Comboni Missionary who heads the Bahrain-based Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, stressed that a “normal” Muslim could not approve of this kind of horrific violence.

“These nuns gave bread to the elderly and disabled Muslims living in their facility. In return, they received gunfire. But God is not absent. He sees everything and knows what he is doing. These fanatics, who have perpetrated this heinous crime, have basically declared to the entire world that these nuns were very close to Jesus—so close that they shared in his end and were killed themselves.”

However, a Salesian priest -- Fr Tom Uzhunnalil -- from Kerala, India, who had been staying with the sisters, is still missing after his reported abduction on March 4.

Fr Tom was praying in the chapel of the convent at the time of the attack, and was then kidnapped by the attackers.

New Delhi’s ministry of foreign affairs confirmed that Fr Tom was taken to an unknown location, along with one of the Indian sisters in the community. Reports later indicated that the sister had been located and was safe.

Sesians remain hopeful that their priest will be freed. Fr Francesco Cereda, Vicar of the Rector Major for the Salesians, told CNA March 7 that, “we trust there is every chance for the release” of Fr Tom.

He said that “the Central Government of India through its Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is involved in trying to ascertain the whereabouts” of the priest.

In addition, “the Chief Minister of the federal state of Kerala, the home state of Fr Tom, has also taken personal interest in the matter and is in touch with the MEA in New Delhi.”

Even “the Vatican, as well as the Catholic Bishops Conference of India are also involved” in tracing the priest’s location.

“Prayers are being offered throughout the Salesian world for his speedy release. We believe that these efforts will not be in vain,” Fr Cereda said.

The Salesians, the only Catholic priests working in the country have had a mission in Yemen since 1997. Initially, it was part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Aden, established by Pope Leo XIII in 1885.

They provide their services in four cities: the capital of Sana’a, Aden, Holeida and Taiz.

But despite the ever more fragile conditions in the country, the Salesians chose to remain in Yemen.

“The Salesians were fully aware that the situation was worsening day by day,” Fr Cereda said.”

The Government of India had asked its nationals to leave the country after it had shut its embassy in Yemen and had brought back thousands of Indian nationals in 2014.”

Fr Cereda said that Archbishop Paul Hinder, the Apostolic Vicar to Saudi Arabia, spoke in January 2015 with the Salesian province of Bangalore, India, to which the Mission of Yemen is entrusted.

“It was felt that pulling out of the mission all together would deprive it of the sole organized Catholic presence in the country,” Fr Cereda recounted.

However, “since it was felt that no one could compel anyone to remain in the given situation, the choice was left to the individual confreres in question.”

“Out of five members, three returned to India and two stayed, with the hope of being of assistance especially to the Missionaries of Charity who had decided to stay on, as well as the few Catholics still working with them in their centers.”

Fr Tom was one of those who chose to stay, recognizing that his work was particularly risky, as he had to move from one community to another.

Yemen is currently the scene of a bloody conflict in which both religious and tribal rivalries play a role.

According to information provided by the United Nations, the year-long conflict has led to the internal displacement of more than 2.4 million people ●

