



Saint Charles Lwanga (and Companions)

The Martyrs of Uganda

Feast Day: June 3rd

St. Charles Lwanga is the patron saint of youth in tropical Africa, converts, torture victims, and the African Catholic Youth Action. He is one of 22 martyrs who died at the hands of King Mwanga of Uganda, who killed the 11 Catholics and 11 Anglicans for not renouncing their faith on June 3, 1886. It was one of many acts of violence by King Mwanga, a pedophile who preyed upon his attendants and young men. Charles Lwanga became the chief page after his predecessor was beheaded for confronting the king about the violence against Protestant missionaries. Charles chose to be baptized that same night.

St. Charles stood steadfast in his faith and encouraged the other young men of Mwanga's court to take root in the Catholic faith. His faith inspired others, even in the midst of the violence, in the face of death. For his unwillingness to submit and his efforts to safeguard the faith of his friends, Charles was burned to death on June 3, 1886, in Namugongo, Uganda. He was 26 years old.

Christianity wasn't always unwelcome in Uganda. The Missionaries of Africa – commonly known as the White Fathers – first introduced Catholicism to Uganda in 1879 under the reign of King Mutesa. By the time his son, Mwanga, became king, there were many practicing their faith who were targeted by the new king. A week before St. Charles Lwanga was executed, King Mwanga had separated and questioned the faithful in his court; it wasn't until they proclaimed their faith openly in court that Mwanga ordered their execution. The 22 faithful were between the ages of 13 and 30; along the way to the execution, Matthias Kalemba was killed when he exclaimed, "God will rescue me....he will take my soul and leave my body."

Ultimately, under the reign of Mwanga, it is estimated that 100 Christians were tortured and killed. Pope Paul VI canonized the 22 martyrs on October 18, 1964. Cardinal Fernando Filoni on May 20th, 2019, proclaimed: "All of us have this responsibility to bear witness to our faith." This is the example that St. Charles, his companions, and all the martyrs of Uganda have set.

May we pray for peace and justice for those suffering at the hands of hardened hearts. May we pray for those with hardened hearts who perpetrate violence. May St. Charles Lwanga, his companions, all the martyrs of Uganda, and all those persecuted for their faith – pray for us.

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