



Our Lady of Kibeho

Do you ever wonder why bad things happen? Or why God allows evil to persist? When tragedy, hardship and suffering occur, we're often left feeling helpless and distraught—even angry. We cry out to our God who is love, and we wonder: Where is that love to be found?

In international law, genocide is considered the intentional targeting and killing of a specific group of people. The Rwandan Genocide stands as a stark moment in history, a moment of darkness and hatred that continues to trouble the hearts of those in Rwanda and those far from its borders. How is it that people could bring about such deadly violence?

But then we are reminded of the story of Kibeho, the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary to three high school girls. Mary first appeared to Alphonsine Mumureke on November 28, 1981, identifying herself as “Ndi Nyina Wa Jambo,” which means “Mother of the Word.” Mary would continue appearing to Alphonsine until 1989. Anathalie Mukamazimpaka and Marie Claire Mukangango also received messages from Mary, though over a shorter period of time.

The message of the Blessed Mother was mixed with joy and warning. She called for conversion, emphasizing the importance of prayer, penance and fasting. Through these spiritual pillars, peace would win out over division, both in Rwanda and beyond. The three high school students received a troubling vision of what would happen if peace was not achieved. They saw violence, destruction and death overtaking Rwanda—what many consider to be a foreshadowing of the Rwandan Genocide.

When St. John Paul II visited Rwanda in 1990, he too called for communities to pray for the healing of local divisions, reminding all Rwandans to turn to Mary as a guide. In 1992, construction began on a shrine at Kibeho, called the “Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows.” And yet, in 1994 civil war erupted as Hutu turned on Tutsi and Tutsi on Hutu, leaving nearly 1 million people dead in the wake of ethnic division.

The spiritual pillars that Our Lady pointed to—prayer, penance and fasting—are still essential. And her call to peace in our world remains pertinent. Although we may never understand why chaos erupts within communities, we can trust that our God, who is love, cries out with us amidst such hatred. We can know that our God—who knows what it is to suffer, to be nailed to a cross—suffers with us. And we can trust that, if we have eyes to see, God continues to work through us to act upon the Spirit's call.

The people of Rwanda suffered greatly, as do so many in our world today—but hope and joy remain. The CRS Rice Bowl Story of Hope from Rwanda proves this. In reflecting on it, where do you find hope—both for the people of Rwanda, and for your own community?