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Beatification of Sister Irene Stefani, 23rd May 2015

I had already received several favors from the soon to be beatified nun, and I was really looking forward to seeing her made 'Blessed' and venerated by thousands of Kenyans. I was also preparing a mental list of intentions, big and small, to place before her on her special day.

06/08/2015

The 23rd of May finally arrived and the day started quite early for us. We had heard that many other people were going to attend this first Beatification ceremony to be held on African and Kenyan soil. The ceremony was going to be held at the Dedan Kimathi University grounds. So as not to take any chances, we woke up at 1.45 a.m. and started our journey at 3.10 a.m. We were a group of 33 ladies using a hired bus, all sleepy but excited and looking forward to be part of the big event.

We arrived in Nyeri some minutes before 7.00 a.m. and were surprised that already there were crowds. Would we get a space, a good one at that, so as to follow the ceremony closely? We alighted from the buses and joined the queues that were leading to the grounds through a security check point. There was excitement written in the faces of everyone, old and young. There were

also many people selling souvenirs of Sister Irene of all shapes and sizes.

We passed through the security checks and started looking for a place to settle in and prepare for the Mass. At this point we split and went in different directions, each hoping to get a nice place. I was with a group of 5 high school girls who had slept over at our house the night before. We got some chairs and sat under a tent facing a screen; this was now 8.30 a.m. I was impressed that despite their tiredness, these girls were eager to understand better the significance of the ceremony. Going through the Mass booklets that we were provided with at the venue helped them to have a better picture of what we were going to celebrate. With us there were also two teachers.

At 10.00 a.m. the Mass started and what a beautiful ceremony it was!

The Beatification rite was read in Latin by His Eminence Cardinal Pengo, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam and in English by His Eminence Cardinal John Njue, Archbishop of Nairobi who was the main celebrant. A portrait of Blessed Irene was then unveiled and we all clapped, ululated and sang with great joy feeling that she was close and part of us. The Mass continued and what impressed me greatly was the active participation and recollection with which the crowds lived through it! I was also happy to see the great diversity of people from Kenya who had come for the event. There were also many other people from different parts of Africa (Tanzania, Mozambique) and the world (Colombia, Italy).

From the homily of the Mass and the speeches that were given after the Mass, some common ideas run across: that Sister Irene loved God

truly and gave her life totally to Him. Because of that, she was able to serve and live for others in a heroic selfless way. And what about us? Her life and death should stimulate all Christians especially in Nyeri and indeed the whole of Kenya to seek heroic sanctity expressed especially in the way we serve others. If we were to follow her example, Kenya would be a different country, filled with unity and peace said one of the local leaders of the area.

During the Mass, I had asked Blessed Irene that I manage to see my Dad easily amongst the crowds of people that were there. To my surprise, just before the end of the Mass, I identified my Dad some few meters directly opposite where we were seated. As soon as the speeches were over, I run to meet him and briefly talk to him. We left Nyeri happy and grateful to have lived through this historic moment and at the same

time challenged to seriously seek God in our lives and serve Him by serving humanity just as Blessed Irene did. And for me, I was filled with an extra happiness for having met my Dad.

R.K

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