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25 Years in Uganda: "I came to cast fire"

Some words written down on a piece of paper by Don Alvaro del Portillo for the late Edith Katama, who helped begin Opus Dei's apostolic work in Uganda.

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"Ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo, nisi ut accendatur!"

These are the words that Don Alvaro, the first successor of St. Josemaria, wrote on a piece of paper for the late

Edith Katama on 8th April 1989, when the fullness of her heart did not permit her to verbally express the fire in her heart. All she kept saying was, “Father! I feel fire.....I feel fire in my soul.....”. On seeing the ardent apostolic longing in her heart, Don Alvaro told her, “My daughter, let me write down for you what you desire to express. He wrote down the above words, and added the aspiration, “*Regina Ugandae, ora pro nobis!*”.

Fortunately, this writing was framed and sent to Uganda, together with the table from which Don Alvaro had written. This was on the 29th November 1996 when the first women came to permanently carry out Opus Dei in Uganda, following the request of Don Javier Echevarria, the prelate of Opus Dei at that time. These were Maria Otero, Ursula Okondo, Alyce Achungo and Agnes Katama, who were coming from Nairobi-Kenya. These were soon

joined by Adwije Igoki and Gertrude Mutava.

But until then, Mrs. Katama had been carrying out Opus Dei for 10 years (since 1986) with the help of some women of Opus Dei who made regular trips to Kampala from Nairobi. The Ugandans who attended the organised activities at that time recall Mrs. Katama's flower shop on Dewington road which served as a convenient venue until 1996 when the first centre opened on Lourdel road.

Mrs. Katama is remembered for her calm and attractive apostolate. Even though she was not outgoing by nature, she was a receptive, kind and generous person. This enabled her to make friends with all kinds of people. Her generosity moved her to give what she would receive. In her flower shop, she would chat with women and also give classes of

formation. From 1996 onwards, Mrs. Katama was happy to see other Ugandan women join Opus Dei after her.

From December 2020, we started preparing ourselves for this Silver Jubilee. The alumni of Teemba Study Centre (which was the first centre of women of Opus Dei in Uganda) agreed to give monthly formational classes to the girls, as a way of giving freely what they had received. These were online for purposes of personal safety during the pandemic. In June, the girls decided to celebrate the feast of St. Josemaria in style. Besides praying a novena to St. Josemaria, they also translated the prayer card to St. Josemaria to different native languages.

In the last half of 2021, we have had online get-togethers with the first women of Opus Dei to come to Uganda. They entertained us with

stories regarding the beginnings of Opus Dei in Uganda. What most of them concluded with, was the statement: *it was not easy, but it was worthwhile*. On the 9th October, we were fortunate to have an online class with the Vicar of Opus Dei in East and Southern Africa, Fr. Silvano Ochuodho. He reminded us of our duty to be witnesses of Christ in our work and day to day events.

In November 2021, we had get-togethers with some Ugandan ladies who had been Mrs. Katama's friends in the beginnings and had later asked to join Opus Dei as supernumeraries. They told us about their first impressions of Opus Dei, and how eventually each discovered their vocation.

All throughout, everyone became familiar with the number 25. The girls took to creativity and shared varied presentations of this number.

25 appeared in form of cake, fruits, stone and bead work, etc. This kept the silver jubilee atmosphere alive.

Finally, the 29th of November arrived. The Silver Jubilee greetings filled not only the phones, but the entire atmosphere. At 5:30pm of the same day, we had a thanksgiving Mass in the chapel of Teemba Study Centre. As the words of the *Gloria* resounded, we could not hold our joy. What was previously a handful of ladies in that flower shop on Dewington road, has now become a reality of girls and ladies of all backgrounds and professions, seeking sanctity in the middle of the world. The cheerful aura was due to the certainty that the late Mrs. Edith Katama was together with the Blessed Virgin Mary, dropping those same flower petals over us.

“Ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo, nisi ut accendatur!”

We realise that we are the continuity,
children of God, called to set a
Christian fire on earth; in a special
way, in Uganda.

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