COURAGE
INTERNATIONAL

3 June 2020
Feast of the Ugandan Martyrs

Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to greet you on the feast day of the patron saints of the Courage apostolate, the 22 Catholic martyrs who gave their lives for the Faith in what is now the nation of Uganda, between November 1885 and January 1887. They are not very distant from us, geographically or in time: we even have photographs of many of them. In these days, it seems to me that they are closer to us than ever, and have many lessons to share. I am thinking of men like:

- *Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe*, majordomo of the palace of King Mwanga II, who risked his position and his life to criticize the king's injustice and unchastity, and died with words of forgiveness on his lips. How we need Saint Joseph's courage and charity as we speak the truth to a world increasingly politicized and opposed to God's Word!
- *Saint Charles Lwanga,* who led the small Catholic community in Mwanga's palace after the king expelled the missionary priests serving there. Saint Charles baptized many of his fellow martyrs, some on the very night before they were led to execution. We know from the last few months how difficult it is to be separated from the sacraments and our parishes, and how much we need the zeal and charity of fellow believers in such times.
- *Saint Denis Ssebuggwawo*, beaten by the king and stabbed to death at the age of only 16, the first victim of Mwanga's terrible rage, which was fueled by jealously, defensiveness and lust. Those who oppose the truth may attack us viciously; yet through the intercession of Saint Denis we can respond with charity, gentleness, and steadfast love.
- *Saint Mathias Mulumba Kalemba* and *Saint Luke Banabakintu*, who, having heard about the persecution taking place at the palace, journeyed together to the capital to turn themselves in and suffer with their fellow Christians. How easy it is to stay quiet while others bear the brunt of criticism. How much grace and fortitude is required to step forward and witness to Christ, at the risk of sharing their fate!

The Martyrs of Uganda have inspired members of Courage and EnCourage for many years, and we rely on their intercession as we pursue together the Five Goals that our founding generation established for us. We draw no less inspiration from those founding members themselves, especially as we begin the celebration of our Fortieth Jubilee, commemorating the first Courage meeting on the 26th of September 1980, at the parish of Our Lady of the Rosary in Manhattan. We owe a debt of praise and gratitude to Almighty God for the many gifts we have received from His Providence through the apostolate, and for the responsibility he has entrusted to us to build on that legacy in our own time and for decades to come.

I usually write to you at Easter, rather than in June, but I have been waiting until I could tell you about our plans for this summer's Annual Courage and EnCourage Conference. We now know that it will be impossible for us to meet in person at Mundelein this year, given the many concerns and restrictions imposed on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. But we are planning to host a "virtual" conference, which will provide a rich opportunity for shared prayer, formation, encouragement and community, both online and, where possible, in our local chapters. A flyer is included with this mailing, and I hope you will be able to join us in July.

The pandemic has also had a serious impact on all our lives, including financial challenges related to workplace closures and unemployment. I have been very moved at the number of you who have continued your charitable giving to Courage International despite this challenging situation, and I am deeply grateful for your commitment and generosity. I also realize that some of our regular donors may not be in a position to contribute to this appeal to the extent to which you would like. But I am gratified by the knowledge that you will do what you can, and that you will always be praying for our members, our chaplains, and our Courage Office team.

Be sure of my fervent prayers for you, particularly as I celebrate Mass for the feast day of our patron saints. I hope that you will join us online for the conference in July, and by livestream or in person for the opening Mass of our Jubilee Year, at noon on Saturday, 26 September 2020, at the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary in New York. Whether we are together or apart, we walk united along the path that Christ has marked out for us. When the going becomes difficult, let us draw inspiration from the words of Saint Charles Lwanga:

> *"Several times the King has commanded you to apostatize. It seems likely that very shortly he will again order you to forsake your religion. Then, you have only to follow me in a group, and boldly affirm that you are Christians."*

Saint Charles Lwanga and his Companions, pray for us!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Father Philip G. Bochanski
Executive Director

P.S. Provisions of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act allow for an additional $300 "above the line" deduction for charitable giving in 2020, and increases the maximum limit for cash contributions for individual donors who itemize their deductions. Please consider whether these provisions might allow you to continue or increase your financial support of Courage International (a 501(c)3 non-profit organization), even in these difficult times.