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Interview with Fr. Alex Mbonimpa

Newly ordained priest Fr. Alex Mbonimpa celebrated his first solemn Mass in Africa at St. Peter's parish, Kisoro Uganda on the 2nd of May. In this interview, he shares his experiences and his journey to the Priesthood.

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Q. Good morning! Welcome back to East Africa! What has struck you most about Kenya and Uganda since

you landed after being away for more than 6 years?

I was struck by the joy of the people which is much more outward than in Europe. I have also been impressed by the piety of the people, especially the attention and unhurriedness with which they respond to the prayers at Mass, and the way they value the priest: for example by entrusting many of their intentions to him.

Q. Back here in East Africa, we refer to you now as "the new priest". What can you tell us about "the new priest"? Where was he born and raised?

I was born in Masaka, Uganda, and that's where I was raised. I did my primary school in Blessed Sacrament School Kimaanya. I left Masaka to go to a boarding school for secondary school. I was at St. Mary's College Kisubi (SMACK).

*Q. What did you study in university?
Which university was this?*

I studied a Bachelor of Science, major in Geology and minor in Chemistry at Makerere University, Kampala. I did a Master of Science in Geology at the same university, with a short research stay at Hamburg University in Germany.

Q. How did you get to learn about Opus Dei?

I learnt about Opus Dei soon after joining University in 1999. A friend I had known at SMACK, four years my senior, invited me to the centre of Opus Dei. I joined the Work in 2002 in my last semester of the Bachelors.

Q. Having lived in 4 different countries where the Work has a stable presence, what are some of the differences that strike you?

Actually, with regards to the Work, what strikes me most is the similarity. I have immediately felt at home in all these countries and felt as if I had known the people with whom I lived in these countries all my life. A major difference between Uganda and the other countries is that the Work has been there a shorter time and so is still in the beginning stages. In Rome, you are with the Father (and with St. Josemaria) and that gives you a constant presence or awareness of the unity of the Work throughout the world.

Q. When did you first think that God may be calling you to be a priest of Opus Dei?

I first felt attracted to the priesthood in my childhood and, at the end of primary school, I was admitted in both a minor seminary and SMACK. I settled for the latter. Although after

my first year in secondary school, my thoughts about priesthood changed (I began to think that married life was the one for me and not celibacy), I still consider my going to SMACK providential because this fact was instrumental in my discovering Opus Dei. When I joined the Work as a numerary at University, I felt ready to follow God wherever he would lead me including to priesthood. When the Prelate of Opus Dei asked me if I wanted to become a priest, I knew that this was a calling from God that was reaching me through him (the Prelate).

Q. While in Rome, did you get to meet Pope Francis? What were your experiences like?

Pope Francis was elected when I was already studying at Navarre University in Spain. However, the two times I travelled to Rome for ordination, first as a deacon and

later as a priest, I was able to be in the weekly audience and the Angelus with him. I was greatly surprised by the immensity of the crowd that attended these audiences. I was also moved by his gestures of affection and attention to the people as he greeted them.

Q. Were you in Rome during the period of Pope Benedict's retirement and the subsequent conclave? What were your impressions?

No, I was not, but I believe that all of us, wherever we were, were greatly moved by the simplicity and humility of Pope Benedict. This conclave was the second that I was witnessing and, like the previous one, I was edified to see the unity of the Church in the whole world, even when some media reports seemed to suggest otherwise.

Q. And I suppose you got many chances to meet the Father. What were your impressions?

Yes, I met the Father often in get-togethers and also in private meetings, some prearranged and others accidental. I was also present at Masses celebrated by him and meditations preached by him. I was always impressed by his joy, which was constant, and by his concern for everything that had to do with his children. I was also impressed by his conviction that he had received a special gift from God – that of having lived at the side of St. Josemaria – and that he had to pass on what he had learnt from him to us. I believe that all of us who were frequently with him agree that he succeeded in doing this through his example and his encouraging words.

Q. Now that you are back in East Africa, what would you say your dreams are?

My dream is to see the message that St. Josemaria received from God

reach more people and for them to live it. The calling to holiness is for all people and if God has created man with this vocation, it means that for man to be truly happy, he must respond to it, that is, strive to be holy wherever he finds himself. My dream is also to see the Work begin in the other East African countries where it has not yet begun and from there to more African countries.

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