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First Church in Africa Dedicated to St. Josemaría

Under shade provided by thatched palm branches, several hundred people from the Congolese town of Nkama-Bangala attended the inaugural Mass for the first church in Africa dedicated to St. Josemaría.

11/14/2008

The Apostolic Nuncio of Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon, Bishop

Andrés Carrascosa, was the chief celebrant at the dedicatory ceremony. He was assisted by two local bishops and many priests from the diocese of Kinkala, in which the new church is located.

Four years ago, when Pope John Paul II announced that he was convoking a Eucharistic Year, students at Orvalle High School, a corporate work of Opus Dei in Madrid, began a fund-raising campaign to foster Eucharistic piety. When the girls learned about efforts the Kinkala diocese was making to recover from the ravages of civil war, they decided to send this money to the Nuncio for the construction of a church to replace one that had been destroyed.

According to Bishop Carrascosa, what the local populace truly wanted was a church where they could pray in peace. What at first seemed only a dream has now become reality.

Everyone in the area collaborated in the construction of the simple but attractive church. The pastor, Father Bienvenu Manamika, asked the parishioners to bring the stones that eventually formed the walls, and during their free periods the seminarians became skilled painters. A few days before the dedication, the exterior was completed. Thanks to the help of another Spanish high school—Grazalema, in Puerto de Santamaría—a statue of St. Josemaría was placed inside the new church.

Many of the faithful spent several days cleaning up the grounds prior to the dedication. Thatched palm branches shaded the area where most of the faithful were seated. Members of the Salvation Army and the nearby Evangelical church also attended the first Mass.

In his homily, the Nuncio encouraged the several hundred people present to become themselves temples where our Lord would feel at home. "The church of St. Josemaría, the fruit of everyone's efforts, is a sign that we can all live together in peace."

The Vicar of Opus Dei in the Republic of Congo spoke briefly about St. Josemaría's love for Africa, which he blessed from the air on his first trip across the Atlantic in 1970.

After the Mass, the entire community celebrated the inauguration with traditional music and refreshments.

Each family returned home with a prayer card of St. Josemaría in the local Iari dialect.

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