

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH



JUNE 3, 2012 – TRINITY SUNDAY

THE MARTYRS OF UGANDA

Each year on June 3, the Episcopal Church commemorates the Martyrs of Uganda, the 32 men who were killed between 1885 and 1887 for failing to renounce Christianity – 12 of whom were burned to death on June 3, 1886.

The Rev. Canon Petero Sabune, the Episcopal Church's officer for Africa, explains:

“In 1884 Mwanga the son of Mutesa, ascended to the throne of his father and demanded total obedience from his subjects. When Mwanga, who, like his father, had embraced Christianity, converted to Islam, he issued a decree stipulating that anyone caught reading the Bible would be executed.

“A group of Catholics and Anglicans at the royal court of Buganda had started reading the Bible in preparation for baptism before the decree went out. Afterward, the older members of the group continued to teach the younger ones in secret, and the church continued underground within the royal court and around the villages in Mengo, Rubaga, Kamapla, and Namugongo.

“On November 15, 1885, Mwanga carried out his threat and ordered the execution of Yosefu Mukasa Balikuddembe. Yosefu became the first to join the ancient African martyrs Cyprian, Felicity, Perpetua, and Augustine in faith and in death.

“In the two years that followed, the king went on a killing spree. The largest number killed at one time, 12, were marched to Namugongo and burned in a fire. They died singing, on June 3, 1886, which has become their feast day. The youngest in that group was Kizito, who was only 15 years old. Kizito would not forsake the gospel, even when the king's executioner pleaded with him to say just a few words so that his life might be spared.

“As we celebrate these martyrs, let us also remember the Christians persecuted today in war-torn Northern Uganda and South Sudan, and pray for peace there and everywhere on this fragile earth, our island home.”



The Uganda Martyrs' Shrine, in Namugongo, Uganda, built in 1973

Collect for the Martyrs of Uganda

O God, by your providence the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church: Grant that we who remember before you the blessed martyrs of Uganda, may, like them, be steadfast in our faith in Jesus Christ, to whom they gave obedience, even to death, and by their sacrifice brought forth a plentiful harvest; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Holy Women, Holy Men, p. 405)