

## **February 25: Celebration in memory of Sr. Renée Guido POPPA, Oblate of the Assumption with Françoise NYIRAGENDO, a Rwandan aspirant**

### **I. The story of the OA Mission in Rwanda and the Remembrance of the 1992 event**

The Oblates of the Assumption - Religious Missionaries were established in Rwanda in 1981, responding to the call of the Church through the voice of Bishop RUZINDANA, Bishop of Byumba who needed nuns for catechetical formation, vocational formation (sewing and culinary arts for women and girls out of school) and the care of the sick (in a dispensary).

From 1990 a current of rebellion began in the mountainous regions, protesting against the government of Juvenal HABYARIMANA who had been in power since 1973. Guerrillas sowed terror in the villages and many victims were massacred throughout the years 91-93. They aimed at overthrowing those in power. Many of those displaced, fleeing the insecurity surrounding the area, were flocking to the mission where our sisters were at the service of all without distinction of religion or ethnicity: care of the wounded - supervision of raped women - care of malnourished children. Sister Renée Guido Poppa, who had come to assist the sisters for a year, was a consolation for these refugees. It was in these conditions that a battalion of rebels rushed to the dispensary and the convent on the night of 25 to 26 February 1992. Tragedy struck our community: Sister Renée GUIDO POPPA and Françoise NYIRAGENDO (post mortem postulant) were killed by rebels who spread terror in Byumba Region.

With all our brothers and sisters of the Assumption family, as well as the laity with whom we journey; we would like to celebrate the memory of Sr. René Guido Poppa and give thanks for the gift of her life given to the service of the Kingdom and to the brothers and sisters beyond the borders

### **II. Biography**

Renée was born in Paris on April 2nd, 1907. Her father, a Romanian doctor, was doing a multi-year internship to perfect his medical knowledge. His name was Basil Poppa and he had married Jeanne Latour, a Frenchwoman. Renée was their only child. She went to primary and secondary school in France, and then the family returned to Romania where Renée attended classes at the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine. She graduated with a doctorate in medicine and surgery. She worked alongside her father at the Bucharest Hospital and as a gynecologist at the Beiuș Hospital. Her dedication and selflessness, her passion for service, her skills and the sureness of her diagnosis all earned her the esteem of colleagues, patients and their families.

When the war broke out in 1940, doctors and the Director of the hospital at Beiuș were mobilised for the army. During the years '43 -'45 years, Renée remained alone as a doctor and surgeon in the hospital. She calmly and competently faced the constant influx of civilian and military wounded, with the help of some Oblate sisters. On February 5, 1945, she was decorated with the "Queen Mary's Cross" by the Romanian Staff General. For years she had been thinking of religious life. She entered the postulancy of the Oblates of the Assumption on November 1, 1945 in Beiuș. She then began the Novitiate April 23, 1946 in Beiuș. Her formator mentions: "she showed herself to be serious, prepared to do anything, engaged others and was generous and simple".

Renée made her first vows on May 4, 1948 in Beiuș - Romania, but a few months later the Oblate's house was confiscated by the communist regime and the sisters scattered. Sister Renée-Guido Poppa and the professed went to work in the Bucharest hospital, she took her place with simplicity among the nurses because the director did not want women among the doctors and surgeons. The sisters organized their work so that they could lead lives of prayer and a community life in secret.

In 1950, Sister Renée Guido was summoned by the French ambassador in Bucharest, because she was born in Paris, of a French mother, she was also a French citizen. He advised her to leave for France.

In Paris, she obtained the French diploma in medicine followed by the diploma of the institute of tropical medicine in Antwerp. In 1951, she was sent to Zaire to replace the director of the Musienene hospital who had returned to Belgium. It is a big hospital with 300 beds. But she returned to Paris to prepare for her perpetual vows. After this time of spiritual renewal, Sr. Renée Guido Poppa made her perpetual profession in Paris on May 4th, 1953.

She was eager to find her new mission in Congo and the people showed their affection for her by calling her "Mama Poppa"! Often the only doctor, she ensured the direction, consultations and the surgery. Despite her professional life, Sr. Poppa was also present in community sharing the humble services when she had free time and the times of prayer she attended faithfully. Her simplicity and humility belied the responsibilities that fell on her shoulders because she was so discreet and self-effacing. People admired her diagnostic and surgical skills, her smiling devotion and untiring zeal.

In 1960, it was the independence of the Congo and the mulesliste rebellion. On July 4, the national army revolted. The Europeans left the country but the missionaries remained at their posts. To ensure the hospital's continued service, the safety and care of the sick, the training of nurses and nursing assistants, Sister Renée Guido, bravely faced the difficulties and the danger with boldness. She continued to do this for nearly 30 years.

In 1988, because of her age (81 years) and accumulated fatigue, she was recalled to France. But in 1989, considering herself "fairly rested", Sister Renée Guido asked to go to Haiti to Port au Prince to help an Oblate working with a charitable organization, to run a dispensary. She devoted herself to it without counting the cost, entirely at the service of the Lord in fervent prayer and in the service of her suffering brethren. Radiating peace and joy, she wrote in her notebook: "Lord, give me at all times of the day to offer a cheerful face and a friendly smile to every man, your son and my brother! "

In 1991, her mission in Haiti completed, Sister Renée Guido returned to France. But in April, her superiors asked her to go for a year to share the toils and fears of the small community of Rushaki, (91.7 Km from the capital Kigali) in Rwanda. She was to help the human and religious training of young people aspiring to become Oblates of the Assumption. The year over, she accepted without hesitation to extend her stay by a few months. She wrote: "To love is to give, to give everything, to surrender ..."

### **III.Circumstances of death**



On the night of 25 to 26 February 1992, a Rwandan patriotic group commanding war against the Kigali government infiltrated the Rushaki region. The rebels attacked the village and killed several people. Then they broke the windows of the dispensary, broke the doors and overturned papers and medicines. They went up to the convent and broke the windows of the community hall. The rebels then broke the windows of the aspirants' room. The aspirants were hidden under their beds, following the instructions given in case of attack. With their torches, the rebels discovered them and ordered them to open the door. They did not move. They insisted but the girls refused. But the rebels deceived them by saying "we have a sister with us".

The aspirant Françoise NYIRANGENDO then went into the courtyard and opened the door. A second aspirant, Anuarite took refuge at the stove. Roseline stayed near Françoise. Verena was under her bed. Sister Renee Guido, who was praying in the chapel adjoining her room, seeing Françoise pass by, went out with her rosary in her hand. The rebels pushed them along the wall. Roseline heard the sister say "if you want to kill us, kill us here" a gun fired in the distance and seemed to come from the army. This made the rebels say: "quickly, hurry up". Roseline sneaked into cypresses and climbed into a tree where she stayed terrified until morning. That was when the rebels killed sister Renée Guido and Françoise. Only in the morning, Roseline and Verena discovered the bodies. The murder having taken place outside the house, they did not realize the tragedy that had happened. Sister Charlotte, superior of the community, went to Byumba to telephone the Congregation and to inform the bishop who himself informed the French Embassy.

At the funeral Mass, presided over by Bishop RUZINDANA, Bishop of BYUMBA, present next to the Oblates of Rwanda was the Archbishop of Kigali, the Protestant Bishop, the Ambassador and the Consul of France, about thirty priests. Sisters from Paris and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Also present were other Religious congregations (Dominican sisters, the sisters BENEKIKIRA, the sisters of the Good Council), the apostolic nuncio bringing the message of prayer of Pope John Paul II, and a crowd of Christians from the Region. Sr. Georgette Marie Fayolle, then Superior General, was able to write: "The violent death of Sr. Renée Guido Poppa puts the final seal on her missionary life in perfect coherence: the Oblate joins Christ in the total gift of her life ". She was 85 years old, which included 44 years of missionary religious life. More details, read in "Pages d'Oblation, Volume XII-XV, p. 163-168, "edition of the General House.

The rebellion was a prelude to the genocide that erupted following the murderous attack of 6 April 1994 against President Juvenal Habyarimana, who had been in power since 1973. The mission of the Oblates of the Assumption was temporarily closed. It was opened once again in 1995 from Kigali. Currently, our Rwandan sisters are based in 4 communities continuing the mission.

Two years ago - on February 25, 2017, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the assassination of Sr. Renée Guido Poppa and the aspirant Françoise. "One life given for the mission, two seeds, for the Kingdom: one younger, the other more mature, fallen in Africa for "ART". Let us not forget them! May they intercede for the gift of peace and hope in our hearts, our communities, our countries and for the whole world", wrote Sr. Felicia Ghiorghies, Superior General.

<https://soeursoblatesassomption.wordpress.com>

## **I. Proposal for a celebration**

### ***a. Chant d'entrée: Si l'espérance t'a fait marcher***

1. Si l'espérance t'a fait marcher Plus loin que ta peur (x 2)  
Tu auras les yeux levés    Alors tu pourras tenir  
Jusqu'au soleil de Dieu.

2. Si la colère t'a fait crier Justice pour tous (x 2)  
Tu auras le cœur blessé    Alors tu pourras lutter  
Avec les opprimés.

3. Si la souffrance t'a fait pleurer Des larmes de sang (x 2)  
Tu auras les yeux lavés    Alors tu pourras prier  
Avec ton frère en croix.

4. Si la faiblesse t'a fait tomber Au bord du chemin  
Tu sauras ouvrir les bras    Alors tu pourras danser  
Au rythme du pardon

### ***b. Extract from the biography and prayer of the Psalm:***

Renée Guido Poppa, the only daughter of her parents, a physician, chose humble life and begin a journey as a gospel missionary, fully available to the poor and living among the poor. Identifying herself with Christ, she lived in simplicity and obedience, ready to meet the people who need her most, regardless of race and religion. In an opening to the will of God, she liked to say "to love is to give, it is to give everything, to surrender. "

With Sister Poppa and Françoise Nyiragendo, and all those who today take the missionary journey in the name of Christ; for all who are waiting to know the name of the Lord, we bless the God, of the creation, of whom we hold our life, on earth as in heaven / with this psalm, taking up the refrain:

***R// : To love is to give everything, to love is to give everything,  
To love is to give everything and to give oneself***

### **Psalm 103, 24- 34 :**

24 How profuse in your works, Lord! + All this, your wisdom did it; the earth is filled with your goods.  
25 This is the immensity of the sea, its innumerable swarm of animals, big and small,  
26 his ships that journey, and Leviathan that you did to serve your games.

27 All, they rely on you to receive their food in due time.  
 28 You give: they pick up; you open your hand: they are filled. R //  
 29 You hide your face: they are terrified; you take a breath, they expire and return to their dust. 30  
 You send your breath: they are created; you renew the face of the earth.  
 31 Glory to the Lord forever! May God rejoice in his works! R //  
 32 He looks on the earth: it trembles; he touches the mountains: they burn.  
 33 I want to sing to the Lord while I live; I want to play for my God as long as I last.  
 34 May my poem be agreeable to him; I rejoice in the Lord. R //

### **C.Listening to the Word of God: Romans 8:31-39**

"Nothing will separate us from the love of God"

#### **c. Prayer of intercession and thanksgiving**

*R // :Lord , make us peace workers, Lord make us builders of love*

- 1.Lord, we pray for Rwanda and all its inhabitants who have been bruised by the violence and especially the genocide of '94, inspire your people and political leaders to seek the path of justice in the truth, and seek the reconciliation of the people to eradicate any attempt at violence and revenge. Lord Jesus, the prince of peace, listen to us.
- 2.For all those who are committed to listening to the victims, to the education of children and vulnerable families and to rebuilding a just world in truth and peace. Lord, we pray to you.
- 3.For the Church of Rwanda which begins this year 2018, a special year of reconciliation by calling all Christians and men of good will to "Reconcile with their painful history - to forgive and ask forgiveness in justice and truth ", so that the dramatic situations that they lived do not happen again, Lord we implore you.
- 4.We thank you Lord for the life of Sr. René Guido Poppa, for the call you made to her and the graces received from the Lord, for the life given of the young Francoise who shared the test of martyrdom with her formator. Lord by their intercession, send more workers to your vineyard - Lord, God of the humble, we bless you.
5. Yes, we believe it, as Tertullian says: "The blood of martyrs is seed of Christians". For the mission which is rooted progressively with young Rwandan vocations at service of the Church and in the proximity of the poorest Lord master of history, we praise you.
- 6.For all the consecrated persons who dare the missionary adventure in the insecure land, audacious witnesses of your presence, and for all those who are persecuted today in their place of mission, Lord watch and guide them!

After free -inspired intentions .....we can also make the intentions from the story stated at the beginning ...

**Closing : 1 pater , 3 Ave Maria for peace and final song :**

#### **MON PÈRE, JE M'ABANDONNE À TOI**

Paroles d'après Charles de Foucauld et sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus

1 . Mon Père, mon Père, je m'abandonne à toi / Fais de moi ce qu'il te plaira.

Quoi que tu fasses, je te remercie, / Je suis prêt à tout, j'accepte tout,

R/ : Car tu es mon Père, je m'abandonne à toi  
Car tu es mon Père, je me confie en toi.

2. Mon Père, mon Père, en toi je me confie, / En tes mains, je mets mon esprit.  
Je te le donne, le cœur plein d'amour./ Je n'ai qu'un désir : t'appartenir.





